Weird Tales
THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE
FEBRUARY 1924
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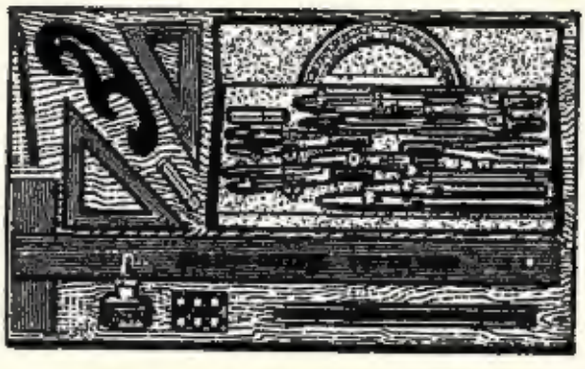

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The Weird Adventures of a Young Man Who Was Shot Into Space in a Giant Rocket

Planet Paradise

A Complete Novelette

By DICK PRESLEY TOOKER

PROLOGUE

THE last of the Cluni reigned over a tribe of man brutes. Queen Saga trusted in the gods. From the sky, in flame and thunder, was to come the great teacher, the mate for Saga, the salvation of the people.

Bright eyed, star, planet and atom watched the move of universal Destiny. Years fled like days. Progress forged on with one people, degeneration with another. The sun burned on to light the way for the races of man. Stars broke loose from their positions in space and went hissing into eternity; comets shot across the boundless chart of the heavens; the juxtaposition of space bodies shifted—the time came.

A sensation brightened the weary spirits of the earth-born. Faithless civilization again laughed at an impossible venture. James Weston alone felt confident that his premeditated journey's end was to be the planet Mars.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SCOFFERS OF GENIUS

ON THE outskirts of the city, where a golf course had once been, James Weston's instrument of marvelous speed awaited its inventor's hand to plunge into heights and distances unbelievable.

A large workshop nearby showed the serious toil and pains that had gone to create the sensation of the century. A high fence surrounded the whole of the grounds, through which curiosity seekers peered.

The rocket-like tube rested upon a trestle-like stand nearly a hundred feet high. A spidery ladder led up to the body of the rocket from the ground. Huge gliding wings lay along the sides of the cylinder, while from either end extended several smaller cylinders, one upon the other, resembling a telescope.

Appearing like ants in comparison with the rocket, Weston, the inventor and builder, viewed it from the ground in company with Stanley Monning, an old and skeptical scientist, professing to know much about planets, constellations, gravity and the stratas of the air a few million miles above.

"It can't be done," said Monning, shaking his gray head.

Weston drew up his tall form and fixed his eyes upon the shorter man.

"I say it can be done," said he, vigorously, his straight mouth set in a grim line above his stubborn chin.

"Why, man!" expostulated Monning, "even now Mars is thirty million miles from us."

While Monning talked he watched Weston closely; for Monning believed the inventor might be violent and was prepared to escape at the first signs.

"That isn't so," Weston was quick to deny Monning.

"What proof have you that it is not?" asked Monning.

"Proof!" exclaimed Weston, his gray eyes holding the older man's weak brown ones. "What proof have you that Mars is thirty or forty million miles away? A fool's mathematical theory decided that. Do you suppose that diminutive eye-glass at Washington Observatory is large enough to see an object thirty-six million miles away? Put an aeroplane up four miles or forty from the crests of the west coast Rockies and see if you can see it with that telescope or any other. You can't see it!

"Call it density of atmosphere or head swell if you will, but, according to the distance you estimate Mars to be, you'll have several million miles of atmosphere to penetrate before you name all the canals. Thirty-six million miles—when the human eye sees that far with any contrivance we have not, we'll discover the thrones of the gods!"

"Nonsense," scoffed Monning.

"Believe my ideas what you will. I shall prove to you and your doubting world that the planet Mars can be reached from Earth."

Monning smiled pityingly. Weston winced, but his strong hands clenched and his gray eyes flashed. He went on arguing.

"The force driving this rocket acts in a vacuum with scarce any depleting of its driving power. I don't need air or atmosphere in order to travel with my invention. The gas makes its own resistance. Moreover, I can supply it with enough gas to last for a much longer time than it will take me to reach any planet we can see from Earth.

"Monning, this is no fool's attempt," Weston grew more earnest. "and I'm not not insane. I don't believe Mars is more than 200,000 miles from us at this hour. I'm prepared for that journey—compressed air for myself—shock absorbers that protect a soft body going at the rate of five hundred miles per hour. I have gliding wings and reverse charges of gas for brakes. I will have to do nothing but live during the entire journey. Timed ignition will set off the gas until I arrive within the gravity of Mars which presents at this moment a ten thousand mile wide target. That target isn't infringed upon by any other planet's gravity either—you know that, Monning.

"I've tested models, and none have returned to earth that I have found—"

"Probably fell into the sea," Monning muttered.

Weston glanced at him suspiciously, then went on fluently:

"I have placed cartridges of explosive at both ends of the rocket. It will move either forward or backward at my will. The gas chambers can be recharged anywhere with the materials inside the rocket as it stands now ready for the trip. At eight o'clock tonight I shall leave the earth, and sometimes I hope it will be never to return. It appears that you scoffers of genius could at least wish me well. You laughed at Fulton and his steamboat, but you ride in them now; you scoffed at telegraphy, but you're talking around the world today; you sneered at men because they believed it was possible to fly, and now airplanes pass over this city every day carrying your mail. Why not believe there is at least a chance of reaching another planet?"

"Your beliefs are so radical and opposed to the beliefs proven by years of research and investigation," said Monning, "that I could hardly think seriously of your foolish attempt. You are young yet and still precocious—depend on youth to be precocious when it thinks it knows something of science. If you will try this foolish, dangerous prank, do it, but I advise you to give it up. I'm certin you'll lose your life."

"What do I care for life," exclaimed Weston. "when within my grasp is the most marvelous discovery the world has ever known? I start at eight o'clock tonight. If you come to watch me depart, be sure you stay outside the boundary of red flags outside the fence—you'll regret it if you don't."

While talking they had approached an iron gate leading out into the field around the rocket's inclosure. Weston unlocked the gate with a key from his pocket and let Monning out.

"I think you will have quite an audience tonight—depend upon the American public for that," said Monning at the gate, indicating the knots of people peering up at the rocket from the road a half mile away. "I'm sure no one will forget you tonight. I wish you the best of luck in the interest of science."

A sarcastic note in the older man's voice took the pleasure out of his farewell. To Weston it was worse than nothing. A bitterness rose within him at the thought that among the millions of souls who knew of him he could designate not one who was in sympathy with him.

A suburban car hummed along its track three blocks away. Monning hurried out to meet it and return to the city. Weston watched him go, then at a question from a workman in overalls, who had approached him from the work-shop, he returned to his preparations for the most audacious expedition ever contemplated by man.

CHAPTER TWO

INTO THE INFINITE

BEFORE the afternoon was half gone the sky grew overcast with heavy, low-hanging, gray clouds. A drizzling rain set in. Times Square clogged with umbrellas and covered vehicles. Like the sky, the city took on a dreary and gloomy aspect.

Yet intense excitement burned in the breast of many all through the afternoon. From the nation's center of activity, telegraph, cable, telephone and wireless spread the news of the coming sensation—man's first attempt to reach a planet.

Throughout all the excitement, ridicule was dominant. Even the most radical of scientists were skeptical, though some envied the sensation the hair-brained inventor was making. Just as Weston had told Monning, the public ridiculed or poked fun at the product of another man's hard work, while their forefathers had passed through the same condition precluding the success of other wonders of the world's progressing industry.

Whatever the public thought of Weston and his rocket, they flocked to witness his start. Long before the time of departure an immense crowd gathered beyond the danger signals outside the rocket's inclosure. Gas driven vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians grew into a solid mass. Trolley cars were blocked along the track nearest the field. The police, with doubled force, worked incessantly to prevent jams and hold the rear spectators from pushing the foremost too close to the rocket, glistening through the misty atmosphere.

Stanley Monning, with a friend of like mind, watched developments on the outskirts of the gigantic crowd. An indefinable nervousness possessed Monning. He could not react to the jocular remarks of his friend. Despite his efforts to shake it off, a feeling of awe was

arising in Monning. No doubt his talk with the earnest Weston that morning had caused this. At any rate, Monning, hard-headed and stubborn as he was, felt, somehow, that he was about to witness the beginning of a magnificent achievement.

Weston watched the throng gather from the door of his workshop. A cynical smile quirked his lips. The majority were pleasure seekers, some were merely curious, some extravagant pessimists, a few neutral, still fewer envious; none had faith in him.

Weston blamed himself for their lack of faith—he had never made any friends. Even in college his time had been taken up with his experiments. And yet he hated them for their skepticism, their pessimism, their utter lack of sympathy. Such attitude of mind caused him to wait impatiently for the time of his departure, a departure which would leave behind no sorrowing ones, nor leave him with any regrets in his heart.

At a few minutes of eight o'clock Weston mounted the ladder leading to the door of the rocket. A hundred searchlights played upon him as he climbed through the dripping atmosphere. Weston disappeared inside the rocket. The searchlights paused on its rain-drenched, glistening sides. The great throng seemed to hold its breath as the minutes ticked on toward eight o'clock. Motionless, yet menacing, a suddenly superhuman thing, the steel monster lay pointing into the heavens.

Five minutes after Weston entered the rocket, a great beam of dazzling light flashed out where the rocket had stood. Accompanying it, a terrific, grinding roar shook the entire vicinity. Automobile windows were broken by the shock; spectators on foot were overthrown, while a powerful wind swept back over them, carrying every light object with it from the center of disturbance. Panic reigned, and then was quieted by sight of the powerful beam of light shining down through a jagged rent in the clouds. Around the gaping hole, lit up by the dazzling white light, the gray vapor twisted and tumbled as though some mighty vortex of wind was whirling heaven-ward. A distant rumble, like peals of thunder, rolled incessantly.

As suddenly as the beam of light had blinded the spectators, it drew up through the rent in the enshrouding clouds and disappeared. As quickly the muttering thunder died away from far above. The great crowd, with little thought of the damage wrought, dispersed slowly, many with a great awe in them. Monning shivered in the rear seat of his car, and his joking friend was strangely silent on the way back to the city.

The terrific shock of the first explosion rendered Weston unconscious. The speed at which he was traveling was tremendous. Three thousand miles he had traveled before he awakened slowly in the depths of the cushioned shock absorbers. It seemed to him that the rocket was traveling slowly. He knew as in a dream that his engine was awaiting the explosion of the next cartridge of gas.

It came, and the rocket tore on at terrific speed through interstellar space. A ponderous weight crushed Weston's strong frame. His body was flattened out in the depths of the great cushions. Weston did not grow quite unconscious, but he was unable to move hand or foot.

Six days the rocket roared on through the sky, passing afar the outermost fingers of satellite gravity. Free from earth magnetism and carrying its unconscious driver, the man-made engine tore on like a comet, plunging thousands of miles through the infinite void at the urge of the explosions behind.

Across interstellar space the rocket sped into the whorls of Mars's gravity. At first it was almost imperceptibly that the rocket reacted to the magnetism of the whirling planet, then slowly it began to fall. And then, faster and faster, head on, it rushed toward substance.

Weston grew conscious of the change of atmosphere. A definable roar was apparent, though his ears were almost deafened to all sound. But Weston knew the sound now above all was the roar of displaced air. Air meant a planet body!

With infinite slowness, but gigantic effort, Weston threw off the switch igniting the driving cartridges. Again he found another switch and threw it over. A cartridge in the fore part of the rocket exploded with a terrific hiss and rumble. The rocket wavered in midair, backed slightly, then rushed on, while a funnel of livid fire spouted from the rear. Weston set off a second, and then a third charge. Once the rocket shot fifty miles backward, but the charges were light, and the gravity drawing it again took effect.

A fourth charge Weston set off. The gas split the atmosphere with rending fury, and an instant later Weston, in a half conscious state, felt a crash, a terrific jolt, then silence, while a sensation of falling into unfathomable, illimitable space possessed him.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAND OF THE RED MOON

WESTON awakened with a ray of light in his eyes. A great silence beat upon him. He tried to move, but his tortured, starved, thirst-parched body refused to obey his will.

Blinking wonderingly at the light shining through the interstices of the ventilators in the rocket's steel body, Weston strove to obtain command of himself. He succeeded a little and his memory returned. All the terrible flight came back as an unbelievably terrible dream.

Maundering through his thirst-parched lips, Weston managed to move his hands and arms. He pulled the compressed air nozzle from his face and felt refreshed. Trembling, squirming, panting, the disheveled, gaunt and weary man turned on the hose from the water tank nearby. He drank from the running stream with greedy gulps.

With the quenching of his thirst, he found more strength, and worked open the cover of his larder, which chest now rested over his head. Most of the contents came tumbling down on his head, and from the pile of provisions thus precipitated about him he selected a can of milk and, after an exhausting struggle, cut open the can. He found to his disappointment that the milk had hardened into a cheesy mass. Resting on his back, he nibbled the pulpy mass.

Many times he felt an impulse to wolf the entire bit of food, but conquered it by a supreme effort. He dozed off, and it seemed to him that occasionally and from afar he heard a monotonous chant, as of spirit voices. He fell asleep, with the strange, lulling sound in his ears.

When he next awakened a red light glowed about him. The strangeness of it kept him lying still and thinking. He felt a queer lightness, but reasoned that his condition might cause that. When he turned over on the cushions it was to experience an ease of movement little short of magical. But on struggling to a sitting posture he found how terribly weak he really was.

After another drink of water Weston's brain grew clearer. He thought more rationally and felt a new interest in his surroundings. He managed to eat, without dangerous consequence, the greater part of a can of meat from his larder. The food strengthened him a little.

With this renewal of strength, Weston experienced an almost irresistible impulse to investigate the phenomenon of red light. But he mastered this feeling, reasoning that he was not strong enough

to cope with any elements or dangerous conditions of the outside world.

Weston again dropped off into deep sleep, and he thought he heard again in his last moments of consciousness, the strange, faint chant of voices.

It was several days before Weston found the strength and courage to open the door of the rocket. He had not, even then, quite recovered from his exhausting journey through space. But the red light, filtering through the ventilating slits, aroused a curiosity in him too great to deny. The threshold of the door was on a level with his eyes, and he could just peep out of the rocket. A marvelous sight met his eyes.

Low near the broken horizon far away hung a red molten disk flooding the land with its blood-dyed rays. Crest upon crest and crag upon crag of broken mountain ranges glowed dully in the red light, and between Weston and the jagged cliffs lay a vast valley covered by an unbroken forest. There was no breath of wind, and in the stillness of all reigned awe-inspiring sublimity.

A great joy welled in Weston's breast. He had succeeded! The strata of Mars now lay below him and under him and around him—he was upon that planet, and it was a world like the earth. The terrible journey was ended, and he, James Weston, yet lived mayhap to hand down to posterity the greatest of all discoveries and himself experience the most marvelous adventure which ever had fallen to any man's lot.

The chant which he had heard before attracted his attention. He looked about, but could not see directly below him, where the sound seemed to originate. In an effort to command this vicinity, he drew himself up until he could look down from the rocket's position on the side of a great ridge. What he saw held him spellbound until, with his small strength exhausted, he was compelled to drop back to rest.

A score of naked, white savages were gathered below the rocket. At sundry intervals they were bowing their heads from a kneeling position. Accompanying this, they sounded the strange chant which Weston had heard before, at the same time beating their palms upon the ground.

The inventor drew his door shut and pondered over these strange people and the world he had found them in. He quickly decided that the savages were not hostile. On the contrary, they seemed to be worshiping him. There was not a doubt in Weston's mind, after he had thought a short time, that the white savages believed him a god; his strange coming would account for their entertaining such a belief.

Smiling at his forethought in supplying himself with a weapon, Weston buckled on an automatic pistol, with belt and cartridge clips. Then he opened the rocket door, and, climbing out, dropped to the ground easily. Again, as a result of his drop from the rocket door, he became aware of the lightness of gravity and surmised, with satisfaction, that this alone would give him an advantage over the inhabitants of Mars.

One of the white-skinned hairy worshipers caught sight of Weston standing beneath the rocket and cried out to the rest.

"Vola! Vola!" The cry resounded about while the white savages fell upon their knees in worship.

"Peace to you. I mean no harm," Weston called to them, then quickly stilled his tongue. They knew nothing of his language. It would be a waste of time for him to speak it.

Without more words, Weston moved slowly down upon the kneeling people. At the same time he looked over his position. As he had thought, the rocket had fallen on the slope of a great ridge, which was a part of a small range of mountains behind him. The steel sides of the rocket had plowed a groove down the slope until its nose struck the bulge of a small hill and buried itself there, thus bringing the rocket to a full stop.

Weston looked again out over the forest below. He heard a loud, weird, fearsome cry sounding far away from the depths of the trees. The sound of the eerie voice of the wild chilled his blood. It seemed to excite the white savages also. Again they set up their chanting of the word: *"Vola! Vola! Vola!"*

Weston studied the men. They were tall, slender, and sinewy of body, but seemed loosely developed. Mats of hair covered their faces, breasts and limbs. Their eyes gleamed from beneath scraggy locks of briar-tangled hair. They were far from a peaceful sight, and Weston was almost of a mind to retreat into his cabin when the kneeling ranks opened and one whom he had not seen before came slowly forward.

It was a woman—the only woman he had noted among them. Shining masses of long, dark hair tumbled about her shoulders and breasts.

Her symmetrical body, moving gracefully in unison with her shapely limbs, completed a picture exceedingly entrancing.

Weston had known little of women on Earth; he had never given them any of his time. The urge of his genius had taken him out of society entirely. Now his neglected social self rushed up and consumed him in a great flame of feeling. Spellbound, he watched the woman approach within three feet of him and, kneeling, extend her hand.

Strangely thrilled at the contact, Weston took the proffered hand. He stuttered something which he himself did not understand, and wishing to end her servile attitude, he raised her gently to her feet.

Erect, she stood with head slightly above his shoulder. Weston could not tear his eyes away from her face, so free of guile and full of virtuous, sweet, wild, young maidenhood he found it. She was glorious. Science, ambition, earth civilization—Weston forgot them all in the moment her shining, intelligent eyes caught his. She spoke to him in an elemental language understood between all tongues.

Weston thrilled as, with his hand in hers, she pointed off toward the mountains aglow under the fiery rays of the blood-red planet.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHILDREN OF THE FLAMING ORB

THE age-old instinct to have and to hold one woman gripped Weston's heart. His stupendous accomplishment in the short time past grew sorry by contrast with this new discovery. The woman asked him to come, and he followed her down to the band of white savages.

At a signal from the woman a number of the men led the way down the slope on which the rocket had lodged. More of the half-naked men brought up the rear, while several took a position on either side of Weston and his fair captor.

Looking back over his shoulder, Weston saw his rocket gleaming dully in the light of the red planet. All around a strange, peaceful quiet reigned, broken occasionally by the cry of a beast of the forest. This was a new world, truly—a world of beast and plant and human life; it was a planet paradise. A lump grew in Weston's throat and his eyes grew moist. Something greater than he could name stirred within him; for in the flesh by his side walked those who on earth were his ancestors of thousands of generations ago.

"Monning," he muttered, "I wish I had you here."

He fell silent at the quick interest evidenced by the beautiful woman at his side.

At the foot of the slope the company crashed through a dense brush thicket, thence to enter under the silent canopy of the forest. Weston marveled at the size of the trees that towered about him. They resembled the Sequoia species on Earth and the least of them seemed to him as large as the largest on Earth.

For an hour or more the company continued on through the forest at a slow pace. Weston's weakness manifested itself. He grew quickly tired. But he endured his growing fatigue grimly, while he discovered that he traveled faster and with greater ease than the other men. Their movements seemed a trifle slow to him, weary as he was.

At the end of the first hour of travel the company came to a halt at a word from the woman. Several of the men went on ahead. Weston leaned against a tree. Though he no longer feared harm from these people, he disliked showing his weakness, and remained standing and on the alert until the scouts sent out ahead returned and the band moved on.

Always he was aware of the woman treading lightly at his side. She was different from the rest. Her step was sure and graceful; she traveled erect, with head high, while the males moved at a crouch like beasts on the trail of meat.

Gaunt and haggard, Weston stumbled on with his savage escort. The red light faded. The sun's rays slowly blotted out the blood-red disk now near the apex of the firmament's dome. The pale, yellow light grew slowly stronger. A sunbeam filtered down through the tops of the giant trees. Weston saw a panther-like creature glaring at him from a clump of bushes. A snake with queer legs waddled like a toad out from beneath his feet. Two birds, bright feathered, white crested, with long legs and bills, flapped over the heads of the company.

A sudden glare of sunlight blinded Weston. He blinked in it and stopped with the rest of the band. Slowly, as his sight came back, he swept the grand view ahead.

The band had halted on the brow of a ridge, the sunny side of which dropped ahead, almost barren of trees. The landscape dropped at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees for a great distance, bringing up at the banks of a broad stream. Far to the right a large lake gleamed in the morning sun and to the left and directly ahead towered stupendous crags of the mountains Weston had seen from the rocket's landing place.

Not far from the opposite bank of the stream far below, a series of cliffs stretched row upon row into the sky. Great gashes lay along their gray faces. Soon he descried dark, round holes, tiny through distance, but evidently windows and doors in the dwelling on the cliffs. They looked like swallow nests, but while Weston looked a human figure emerged from one and disappeared into another dark opening. Weston divined that this was the home of the white savages with whom he had traveled thus far.

The band of savages moved on down the slope. Weston reeled on with them, the wonder of the land engrossing him until he hardly knew the weariness of his body. A fronding plant grew thick beneath his feet. The leaders of the band beat it continually with long clubs, which, except slender stone knives in their belts, seemed their only weapons. The woman by Weston's side carried no weapon of any description.

Half way down the long slope Weston was able to distinguish the smoke of fires. White forms, skin breech-clouted like his escort, crouched over some of the fires under the cliffs. A hairy male crossed the distant clearing, carrying a dead animal over his shoulder.

The foot of the slope was at last reached. A branch of the great forest behind stretched down off the ridge to an apex here. The band of troglodytes with their Earth visitor had come within a hundred feet of the dense growth of trees and bushes when a hoarse shriek sounded from the depths of the thicket. Weston saw his escort stop and grip their clubs tighter. Fear started their eyes. The woman gripped Weston's arm, and while the company stood inactive a great monster of reptilian species hopped, grunting, out of the mass of foliage.

Zamen! Zamen!" Weston heard a number of the males exclaim in frightened voices.

The reptile, at a single leap, came within fifty feet of the company. The males turned and ran for cover. Weston and the woman alone remained facing the reptile. Wagging its kangaroo head from side to side, the monster rose on its great hind legs, flopping its fifteen-foot tail the while. A disagreeable stench filled the air while the reptile opened and closed its slavering mouth, displaying a frightful row of teeth.

"*Vola ursa, Vola ursa!*" the savages cried as the monster hopped forward again.

Weston drew his automatic pistol and, leveling it at the point where he believed the heart to be, he emptied his gun at the target twenty-five feet away.

A thin stream of blood spouted from the reptile's breast. The animal tore at the bullet holes with its dog-clawed forefeet. Grunting raucously, the creature dropped to all four feet and crouched there with nose in the undergrowth.

Weston slipped another clip of cartridges into his gun. Taking aim at the long neck of the crouched reptile, he poured ten more penetrating slugs into it.

A hideous shriek resounded to the cliffs. Weston, numbed with fatigue, felt a dull throb of horror, then, with the woman, he leaped away in time to escape the first great leap of the animal in its death agony. In frenzied leaps, carrying it thirty feet above the ground, the stricken creature reared and fought about the foot of the long slope. After a few minutes of tearing up vegetation and soil, the reptile leaped away toward the river.

From his retreat behind a screen of bushes, Weston looked up at the cliff-dwellings. Many women and children were scurrying up to safety, while others looked down from far above, peeping from windows, doors and parapets of their stone houses.

The reptile splashed out into the broad stream, leaving a bloody trail behind it. Near the center of the stream it stopped and beat the water to a foaming cataract. Slowly it weakened and at last the current swept it down stream toward the lake shimmering under the sun.

A loud and joyous shout arose from Weston's escort as they came running toward him from their hiding places. The cry was echoed from the cliffs, and the whole populace poured down off the cliffs and down to the banks of the river crying:

"*Vola ua ursa! Vola ua ursa!*"

Weston warmed: he glowed within. Here was appreciation and it was his first taste of it. His heart went out to the strange people. He turned to the woman who was always by his side. Her glorious, wild head was thrown back, and her great, soft, brown eyes held his triumphantly. Fatigue fell from Weston with the surge of a buoyant spirit. The company moved into the shallow stream, chanting:

"*Vola, Vola, Vola ua ursa. Sang Vola! sang Vola!*"

They crossed to the opposite bank and joined the crowd waiting there.

"Peace to you, wonderful people," Weston cried to them, his eyes burning with the fire of a new-born spirit.

An escort of three males and the woman led Weston up into the cliffs along a rock-banistered passage. After a long climb, a level walk of smooth stone was reached roofed by solid, carved marble. The woman led Weston through a stone doorway near the end of the walk.

The pelts of unknown animals lay on the floor beyond and were draped about the walls. Stone slabs in neat position ranged about. A tiny fire glowed in the center of the spacious room, the light of which flickered on weirdly carved pictures on the walls. Overwhelming fatigue again possessed Weston. He sank down on a heavy robe of soft fur and fell asleep almost immediately.

The red light again pervaded all when he awakened. He saw the woman sitting in the doorway. The red light set her superb head and shoulders flaming. She seemed to Weston, as he went out to join her, a symbolical spirit of the wonderful land.

Weston sat down beside her. She took but little notice of him, yet he knew that she was disturbed by his presence. After a moment she pointed to the great, molten disk in the sky.

"Flanen Or," said she reverently.

In his own language Weston unconsciously interpreted it as it sounded. He called it Flaming Orb.

A maiden came up shortly with a platter of meat and a large bowl of water, which she set down before Weston, and, bowing, went away. Weston offered some of the meat to the woman, and they ate together while the red light of the Flaming Orb suffused them with its soft radiance.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRES OF REGENERATION

DAY dawned again. James Weston found his whole soul enveloped in the life teeming about him. The new land was not a hallucination, but Earth was that. Electricity, steam, gas, air and water vehicles—they were all phantoms of the past. He could hardly believe that he himself was of that age of mankind's marvelous development.

Weston knew that to these people he was significant of some great miracle. He learned much during the first day he spent with the woman who so strongly and strangely influenced him.

She called herself Saga, and Weston learned that meant Magnificent. The appellation *Vola*, given him by the people, meant Wonder. Saga traced with him a series of crude pictures prophesying the coming of Vola, the Wonder. An ancestor of Saga's had drawn these pictures, and slowly the whole of the great plan of Destiny unfolded before Weston.

Saga aided this after Weston had studied her language for more than a month. The simpleness of the language captivated Weston, and it was not long before he could use the musical phrases of the woman's tongue. He found no roots, prefixes and suffixes to ponder over; the language contained only those words needed for the conversing of hunters, home-makers and lovers. The very essence of the tongue was life itself, the elements of infinitely simple existence and the features of nature.

Queen Saga told Weston that she had ruled the tribe for ten years. She was the last of a dying race. The old tribe of Cluni, Saga said, could write history with pictures; they understood the elements of architecture; they used cunning methods in capturing game; they were the ones who had foreseen the advantage of cliff-dwellings and had won in war after war through their superior military tactics.

But the ravages of wars had ruined the tribe of Cluni. Inter-marriage with lower tribes had lowered the standard of the race. Hundreds of low-born captives, taken in battle, gradually took the places of the superior warriors who had been killed. Saga's grandfather, seeing the sorry end of the supreme Cluni, made a law that none of the pure-blooded Cluni should marry in a lower class. But the law was made too late. The Cluni dwindled faster and faster. Saga's father and mother fell to a neighboring tribe; a plague struck the tribe, taking all the Cluni but Saga's grandfather. In his declining years he taught Saga the policies of government.

Near the time of his death, Fag, the grandfather of Saga, had a vision. He saw a great flame of fire in the sky that cleaved through the red radiance of the Flaming Orb, struck the tops of the mountains with thunder that shook the forest and mountains and brought with it a terrible engine of the gods. Out of that engine came, after a time, the progenitor of the superior race of Cluni.

Fag believed that the vision was a divine revelation, and he taught Saga to believe as he did. Then Fag died, leaving the last of the pure-blooded, intelligent Cluni to rule over the tribe of slaves while she waited for the coming of Vola the Wonder, which name was given the coming saviour of the race.

"I have watched and waited," Saga told Weston, her brilliant eyes glowing with spirit fire. "I took no mate. It was the will of Flanen Or. A thousand times the Flanen Or faded in the light of the Great One while I watched for Vola, the great man coming from the gods. And then I saw.

"It was like Fag's Vision. Terrible thunder sounded afar and from on high. All my people hid in their houses. I watched from the cliffs in Flanen Or's light. Fire shot down out of the sky; it lighted the forest as the sun lights the forest. The great mountains across the valley flamed with it—the cliffs shook and trembled; a thunder like was never heard before struck upon the mountain tops. The light died away, but the flame had pointed and I led my people there.

"Eight times the Flanen Or faded with the coming of the Great One. I and my people prayed before the monster on the mountainside. From the sides of it came, then, Vola and the vision of Fag was true. You are Vola; you are the saviour of the Cluni, and I am yours; it is the decree of the gods. I bow to it."

The tale was ended while Weston and Saga stood on the edge of a stone parapet overlooking the valley below the cliff-dwellings. The first fire of the Flaming Orb was manifesting itself. The sun's rays, mingling with the growing red, scorched the great forest with living color. The great lake to the left of them and the river directly below gleamed like a polished, golden mirror tinged with scarlet. A mystic, fiery nimbus hovered over all. Weston had watched it many times since his coming, but now the woman's strange story, woven into it like a fable of the ancients, struck an awe within him.

Weston had not the heart to tell Saga that he had not come from the gods; that he was only a common mortal from a race far advanced from hers in civilization. He already understood her simple language well enough to learn that she had perfect faith in his divine origin—and he did not wish to shatter her faith.

A low flame lit up Weston's spirit; it waxed strong and smoldered warmly. The beat of primitive life sounded on all sides, and the elements in him answered. His breath came quicker and slowly his lips parted. Saga was very close.

Down below in the clearing under the cliffs by the river activity went on. A breech-clouted man squatted before a fire; a woman nursed a child and stirred something in a stone pot. Five hunters came out of the forest and waded across the stream, depositing the game they had brought near a cooking fire.

There below and all around was life elemental; no food but to satisfy genuine hunger; no clothing but to hide; no ornaments; no luxury; nothing but the struggle to live, mate, then die.

Weston started. Queen Saga's hand was on his arm. She leaned her head upon his shoulder. The scent of her hair struck fire in his veins. The low flame burned brighter within him. Queen Saga's soft body pressed against his.

A heavy voice broke the silence. Weston and Queen Saga turned. A male knelt on the carved ledge behind them.

"Arise, Clunet," said Saga.

The male obeyed, and Weston noted that he was a superb specimen of his kind: The eyes and brows of Clunet were more intelligent than those of the other males. The man stood in respectful silence until Queen Saga had again spoken.

"Do the Waken's go to war with the Cluni?" asked the woman.

"They do not," replied Clunet. "Flamm Or faded forty times while I watched, and I saw no warriors dancing. A great sickness has come upon them. They die many at a time."

The queen dismissed him and spoke to Weston.

"He has traveled far toward Flamm Or's home. The Waken's abode there—they are our enemies. Clunet says they are weak and Clunet tells no lies. He loves me."

Weston said nothing, but the revelation of Clunet's love disturbed him. Again Queen Saga's magnetism drew him. He fought it determinedly now. Other duties bade him beware how he degenerated into a troglodyte. All his knowledge would mean little to these people. They could not conceive nor use, at the stage of their advancement, either electricity, gas or steam. They had no reasons for wishing to sail upon the lake and river, or fly about in the air.

Yet, within Weston, the old culture sheathed instincts threatened to envelop him, as with every breath he took, the odor of primitive life tantalized his senses. There was no object near to counteract the effect of 'regeneration, which Weston believed was degeneration also. Which ever way he turned he met a symbol of the elements. Behind him was a stone cliff, under him lay a hand-tanned pelt of a wild animal, before him, without a smudge of smoke save for the spiraling wood-fires directly below, lay forest and mountain, lake and stream.

Again Queen Saga drew near Weston, and he grew taut in body. For a panicky instant he glanced about for some friendly object which would help him to realize that somewhere in the great void beyond lived men of his kind—men who knew what he knew and fought with his weapons.

But only the dark mouth of a cliff-dwelling yawned at him, and the stone parapet, leading along the brink of the cliff, stretched out in front of the village, carved there by the toil of undeveloped minds.

The Flaming Orb chased each lingering sunbeam from the landscape, while Weston of Earth and Queen Saga of Mars watched the ever-changing play of light. Weston's mind was fevered with his struggle between his love of this life and his desire to acquaint men of Earth with the facts of his wonderful discovery. But the prophecy of Fag, as told by Saga, ought also to be fulfilled if these people were to advance normally. The strange story and the coincidence of his fulfilling its prophecies affected him strongly. More and more he was growing to wonder how Earth had ever been a reality to him.

The low flame glowing in Weston's breast waxed stronger, grew brighter, consumed more of his cultured exterior. He warmed with the effect of it. It set his blood tingling. One moment he saw himself king of these men, the next moment he berated himself for thinking such thoughts.

Queen Saga could not understand Weston. She had but one idea, and that was that Weston was the mate sent her by the gods. She did not know why Weston rebelled against her advances. This reaction of his saddened her. She was coveted by all the males she had ever known. Why, then, had the gods sent her one who cared little for her.

But the mind of Queen Saga was as an empty void compared with the intricate intelligence of Weston. Saga's method of expression never permitted her to hold back any feeling whatsoever. Like or dislike, hate, fear, or anger were quickly evidenced by her so soon as they had struck her spirit. The man of Earth studied; he pondered over future effects; he was cautious: he looked through a telescope of history toward the inevitable consequences of what he did.

Yet in both the man and the woman the bloom of life flourished, and when Weston slept, after an evening spent with Saga, that bloom swelled nearer to maturity.

The next day and the next Queen Saga drew upon her resources of charm in an endeavor to reach the heart of him whom the decree of the gods had named as hers. But Weston did not answer, he wavered from one side to another. The knowledge of what he might bring to Earth if he could return troubled him. And if he became heart and soul the mate of the Mars woman, he knew he would never return to Earth. Then invaluable knowledge would be lost to science—in the code of his world, he would have failed.

Despite the fact that he knew he was growing to love the life of the new found people, thus putting himself farther from Earth and what Earth meant to him, Weston hunted and explored with the men of Mars. He learned their honesty, their straightforwardness, he found for the first time in his life, genuine human sympathy. The Cluni had faith in him and all that he did—they believed.

Weston joyed in teaching his simple scholars the art of binding wounds, of building with stone and making better pottery. He taught them to make spears and bows and arrows and to use them. With more and more intense interest in their future, Weston raced the foundations of his knowledge in an effort to teach the Cluni everything that he believed they could learn and which would be helpful to them. Always the outstanding characteristic of the Cluni, which made them apt pupils, was their faith in their teacher. Weston, whose greatest invention on Earth had called down upon him the jeers of the public found appreciation in this new land for all that he did.

Clunet's strange philosophy entered Weston; it warmed his heart. He listened and talked to the man of Mars many times.

"You are the best mate for Saga," Clunet told Weston. "I love her. I want her. If she wished for me I would try to kill you. The blood of Cluni is in my veins, but I am a slave and am not worthy of the queen."

It was due to the great friendship which sprang up between Weston and Clunet that Weston learned of Mulock's coveting of the queen.

Mulock was one of the strongest and lowest of the tribe. Weston spoke to Saga about him.

"I fear him," said she. "I should have him killed. It shall be done immediately."

But Weston remonstrated. He argued against so ruthless a murder of one who was a strong warrior.

Saga yielded without further words. Weston's word was law with her, and so Mulock lived to see the woman he coveted throw herself at Weston to be rejected with soft words and subtle, mysterious actions.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BATTLE IN THE VALLEY

A YEAR of Earth's time rolled by. Weston knew that again Mars was nearing Earth, coming closer to his home planet than it would again for ten long years. The revolutions of the shifting planets told that through past investigations. The constellation of Lyra slowly wormed across the Heavens. Weston, knowing well the movements of the various stars and planets, watched, with growing restlessness, the inevitable approach of that period of time when his rocket could be sent on the return trip.

Queen Saga noted Weston's restlessness and his continuous watch of the stars peering through the red mist of the Flaming Orb. His actions boded ill for her hopes of keeping him. It seemed to her that his heart was not with her people.

Weston left the cliff-dwellings on long expeditions occasionally and as Mars came nearer and nearer to Earth he went oftener and stayed away longer. He spent his time looking over the mechanism of the rocket on the ridge across the valley. Clunet saw him working there and reported this to Queen Saga.

"He digs beneath the god-monster on the mountainside. It has fallen down. The end near the sky now points toward the ground. Vola disappears within the monster also. I hear strange small thunders."

Saga did not speak to Weston about his work on the rocket. She was suffering the first effects of deceit and secrecy, which Weston's reticence had born within her. Unwittingly it had been done, but slowly Saga had learned the ways of Earth's tactics; her knowledge was growing more sophisticated.

It was at this time that a hunting party brought in the news that a horde of Nacos were moving across the valley toward the Cluni village in the cliffs. Weston learned that this could mean but one thing—war.

Joining Clunet, Weston went to the village council chamber with Saga. Here they planned their defense.

"The scouts are big-eyed," said Clunet. "They say the Nacos number in thousands. Half that number in truth would be many. But they are crossing the valley. We should meet them before they reach the river. Our food store in the cliffs is low—we cannot endure through a long siege."

"Clunet is right," Saga spoke. "We must drive them back before they reach the river. They will ravage our hunting grounds."

Both waited for Weston to speak. He was about to sanction their plans when a man appeared in the doorway of the chamber. It was Mulick, whom Clunet had warned Weston against. Bowing low, the hulking, beastlike man asked to be admitted.

"He is a good warrior—one of our best fighting men," said Weston. "Let him speak with us."

Queen Saga motioned him in. After he had squatted down by Clunet's side Weston spoke.

"How many fighting men have we?" he asked.

"Five hundred," Clunet and Mulick answered in one breath, and Saga nodded an affirmation.

"Then let three hundred meet the Nacos and two hundred remain to defend the village." Weston suggested.

"That is well," Saga approved.

"Let us attack in three parts," Weston went on. "Let one part be led by Clunet, one by Mulick, the other by myself. We can then attack from the front and both sides."

Mulick's deep-set eyes glittered beneath his shaggy brows. His teeth bared—it was his way of smiling. Weston thought him gloating over the coming victory.

Clunet and Saga, though they consented to this, were not so evidently pleased as was Mulick. But an excited hunter came rushing in, bearing the news that the Nacos were half way across the valley, consequently the council was broken up before Saga or Clunet found time to enter any objections to the division and leadership of the forces.

A great number of the Cluni had gathered in the clearing below the cliff-dwellings. Women and children still wound up the trail to the safety of their rock abodes. The leaders chosen for the coming battle divided the fighting men gathering in the clearing. Weston sent out scouts to watch the movements of the Nacos. During the division of the forces Clunet, who was troubled, spoke to Weston.

"I do not question those of greater mind than I," said he, "but have you not forgotten that Mulick is jealous of you, and has showed this by word and act? And he desires the queen. Much may happen in the heat of battle when one leader is not worthy of trust."

Weston was quickly serious.

"Mulick will forget his troubles in serving the tribe. We must all forget our own desires when the safety of our home is at stake. Mulick is a great fighter. The men will follow him well. Do you know any other whom they would follow better?"

Clunet did not, and the preparations for the battle went on. Two hundred of the less choice fighting men took to the cliffs in order that they might defend them in case any of the Nacos advanced that far. The rest of the men, numbering approximately three hundred, were divided almost evenly between the three leaders: Weston, Clunet and Mulick; Weston having a few the greater number because he was to take the central division. Mulick was to lead the left flank and Clunet the right.

The long Mars day was half over when the little army crossed the river and climbed up the long slope to the edge of the great forest which covered the valley beyond.

Weston had thought Queen Saga back in the safety of the cliff-dwellings, but, to his surprise and chagrin, she joined him at the edge of the forest with an escort of ten men.

"Why have you come?" Weston asked her. "The enemy will fight the harder when they see you in our ranks."

Queen Saga straightened to her greatest height. "I fight with you, Vola," she declared. "I am not afraid to die or to live with you."

Her eyes challenged Weston; they fired him, too. Excited as he was by the coming battle, the evidence of faith and love and courage from a woman whom he had never given any reason to believe he loved, set his blood on fire. He argued no more with her, but consented to her presence with him, strengthening her guard to a full twenty of picked men.

Weston, Clunet and Mulick conferred together before they led their men on. It was decided that the different divisions should separate before going further, all to march within signaling distance. When the enemy was reached Weston was to discharge his automatic as the signal for the charge. More scouts were sent out ahead to reconnoiter and the army marched ahead, Mulick leading the left flank, Clunet the right and Weston and Queen Saga the center. Thus, with spears glinting and bodies shining in the sunlight, the army of the Cluni disappeared into the forest.

The eyes of the fighting men glowed brightly with the excitement of the prospective battle. They were surcharged with energy for the coming clash. Weston walked as in a dream. His scant breech-clout, the remainder of his earthy garments, was all that covered him. The automatic, the ammunition of which had long been carefully treasured by him for emergencies, contrasted strangely with his wild, unkept appearance. Saga, close to the rear under heavy guard, seldom took her eyes from his back. In Saga's heart the battle was as well as already won. Vola who had come from the gods would lead them to sure victory.

Far to the left, Mulick set a fast pace for his company. In the heart of Mulick deceit had grown from the seed planted there by the man of Earth. Some of the mysterious secrecy evidenced by Weston had diseased the pure, though low, mind of Mulick. And with the aid of a hundred men at his back, his ambition flamed high. Mulick's intent was to win the battle without the aid of either Weston or Clunet and their men. Only

another step then and Weston and Clunet could be conquered. With this in mind, Mulick forged far in advance of the other contingents and quickly arrived in the vicinity of the oncoming Nacos. With one great stroke Mulick strove to win in love and war, and realize his every ambition.

The first sign of Mulick's treachery came to Weston and Queen Saga while they were moving cautiously within five arrow flights of the marching Nacos. They heard a faint shout, then a chorus of cries; the sound of distant blows. The battle cries grew louder and louder

"What is it?" cried Queen Saga to Weston.

"A battle is going on," he returned "Mulick surely must have outdistanced us and fallen upon them already." He dispatched a runner to discover the state of affairs. The entire force halted and stood waiting under giant trees for the runner's return. All the while the sounds of shouts and blows grew nearer and nearer through the trees, echoing along the silent forest aisles with increasing volume. Weston grew uneasy. A runner from Clunet on the right came up, out of breath, and was sent back with the command that Clunet bring his men nearer the central body and await developments.

Uncertain as to what course to take, Weston finally ordered an advance. The white-skinned warriors, nervously fingering their spears and bows, had not advanced a dozen spear lengths before the runner, whom Weston had sent out, came panting up, shouting that Mulick was retreating. At nearly the same instant the forest ahead was filled with running Cluni.

"Mulick! Mulick! Death to him. He has betrayed me!" cried Queen Saga.

Weston fired the signal to charge, and his men surged forward, shouting their battle cry. They met Mulick's panic-stricken men. A mass of twisting, wriggling, screaming warriors piled up on the forest floor. Weston's men strove to advance; Mulick's sadly depleted hundred strove to retreat, while behind them came the yelling, dark-skinned horde of Nacos, fired with a taste of victory.

In vain Weston and Queen Saga strove to steady their men, but the axes of the Nacos took heavy toll and the Cluni slowly gave ground to them. The great forest resounded with the blows of stone war clubs and the shouts of battle-maddened primitive men. Dead and dying quickly covered the forest floor. Weston shot away his precious cartridges to no avail; his men were beaten before they began; Mulick's retreating band had demoralized them.

On the right flank Clunet and his men were engaged in hot strife against superior numbers. A horde of the enemy charged down between his men and Weston's; they spread out behind both forces and surrounded the entire Cluni army. Hemmed in on all sides, the Cluni fought over the bodies of the fallen

With the battle yet in progress the Cluni were cut off from their retreat to the cliffs. Certain victory turned to overwhelming defeat. In the excitement of the fray the Cluni forgot Weston's teachings of the advantages of spear and arrow. They dropped what they considered superfluous material and fell upon their foe with knife, club, tooth and nail.

Queen Saga's guard of picked men alone remained intact while the battle waged furiously about them. The first charge of the Nacos had swept by the guard's couched spears. Weston did not leave them. One thought since the beginning of the battle had been within his heaving breast. It was Saga! One great, devouring flame consumed his every other desire, and that was what Saga really meant to him now that she was endangered. His thoughts fled to the rocket on which he had spent much of his time of late. The guard was slowly being forced in the direction of the ridge on which it lay.

Weston heard Saga's voice in his ear. Bravely she was crying:

"They can never defeat you, Vola—you will win—you will win!"

Still the primitive woman had faith in him; a faith that knew no bounds. Weston furiously asked himself why he had thought of returning to Earth; why he had thought of leaving this wonderful paradise where human love and faith and truth were unsullied. What of the bloodshed, the privations and hardships endured; what of disease? This was paradise for Weston, and, strangely, the overpowering realization came to him in the heat of battle.

Crying his eagerness to fight, Weston thrust his automatic with the last clip of cartridges into its holster. Snatching a stone mallet from a dead guard's body, he lay about him with all his strength. Blind with the fury of battle, he gave and took blow upon mighty blow, while he heard the woman shouting encouragement to him above the conscious cries of the struggling men.

Five of Queen Saga's guard had fallen when the band attacking them lost heart and disappeared into the forest in search of easier fighting. Weston leaned on his bloody mallet breathing heavily. A bleeding Cluni staggered up to him from a copse of dense brush. A broken spear haft protruded from his torso, half his scalp was laid open and his right arm hung limply by his side. It was Clunet.

"I fought," came from his bloody lips in fevered tones—"I fought to save the Queen and the Cluni, and, oh, Vola, I shall meet the gods with joy because you are yet alive to save the woman I love!"

Then he died.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CONFLICT TO SURRENDER

JAMES WESTON stooped over the fallen man with the queen. Remorse filled his heart. To his death Clunet had faith; he believed that James Weston was Vola, the Wonder; that he could save Queen Saga in the hour of defeat.

"Man, man," Weston spoke in his own tongue to the silent ears. "If I had only known one on Earth like you—a comrade, a friend, a true man. I brought your people deceit and I thought you lower than I. Ten thousand years my race has advanced one way and retreated the other."

He looked up into Queen Saga's brilliant eyes. "One woman," said he, while his voice shook with emotion, "in defeat I would make you mine. Our gods are one and alike, but your spirit the greatest; our bodies are no different, but yours is more perfect. For that much I love you and I will die for you."

"Not die," her voice was welling with love. "Vola cannot die. You will save me and the Cluni with thunder and fire—with your magic. As Clunet believed, so do I, and I love you."

Weston gripped her supple arms for a tense moment, then they were disturbed by the sound of running feet from the direction of the scattered fighting. A dozen of the Cluni came running through the trees, hailing the queen's party with great joy. This strengthening of the guard greatly encouraged Weston. The newcomers knew little of the general effects of the battle, save that they had been cut off from the main force. None had seen Mulick, and Weston surmised that the over-ambitious leader had fallen.

After arranging his men in the most efficient manner, Weston gave the order to return to the cliff-dwellings, though he had small hope of their ever reaching the river. And scarcely had they advanced twenty yards before they met a company of the enemy thirsting for battle. The queen's guard was forced to retreat at a run in order that the

Nacos might not surround them. Creeping into a thicket, the small band of Cluni managed to hide from their pursuers who then proceeded to search cautiously for them.

The game of hide-and-seek ended when a Naco warrior caught sight of the queen as she was being lifted over a fallen tree. Another skirmish began. Weston knew now that the only safety for the queen lay in retreat and that a well-generaled one.

The slow retreat, requiring fighting at short intervals, brought the band of Cluni nearer and nearer the rim of the valley opposite the cliff-dwellings. Weston thought of Queen Saga's reference to his saving the Cluni with "thunder and fire." The rocket on the ridge was now in perfect working order. It held in its chambers a terrible force for destruction. Weston wracked his brain for a method by which to use it in battle. A possibility presented itself and Weston hurried the retreat.

The sunlight was dying in the red glow of the Flaming Orb when, with a hoarse cry of triumph, Weston sighted the rocket looming through the trees from its perch high on the ridge. His joy was contagious and was echoed by the band. But the sound proved their undoing.

A band of pursuing Nacos had managed to circle around to the front of the retreating band and were searching for the creeping Cluni when the sound of the shouts attracted their attention.

With a sinking sensation Weston saw a number of dark-skinned men slinking through the trees and cutting off his path to the rocket. The Nacos charged. Swinging his stone mallet, Weston urged on his men. Running low with the queen in their center, the Cluni met the oncoming Nacos half-way. Far behind the main body of trailers echoed the cries of their band. Weston heard and knew that the fight must be short, sharp and decisive else the main body of the enemy would overtake them and all chance of reaching the rocket would be lost.

A dozen of the charging foe fell at the first flight of the Cluni's arrows, then the lines closed. A stone knife slit Weston's arm from shoulder to elbow; he parried with his mallet and with a short jab stunned his adversary. The Cluni fought like fiends. Man after man fell on both sides; Weston could feel the ranks of his men thin, then the tide turned. The few remaining Nacos fled. But only five of the Cluni remained to guard the queen. Weston could not hold them. Shouting triumphant cries, they ran after the fleeing Nacos. Groaning, Weston viewed their end before he saw it in a clearing a few yards away.

The Nacos, discovering how few pursued them, turned about and fell upon the over-confident Cluni. To the last man they died, and quickly Weston and Queen Saga, who had hidden in a thicket throughout the battle, ran toward the ridge where the rocket rested. Up the steep slope they panted, while below the angry Nacos poured out of the forest on their trail.

Weston flung open the door of the rocket as he passed it. Inside he could see the row of operating switches reflecting the red glow of the Flaming Orb. On up the ridge Weston staggered with the queen close at his heels.

A thirty foot bank with almost perpendicular sides crowned the ridge above the rocket. Weston climbed to the top of this, drawing the queen after him. Panting, he lay down close to the brink and, rolling over and over, shifted to a position where, like a bright point of fire, he could see the switch that set off the rocket's gas. As he leveled his pistol at the gleaming point the forest below vomited forth a hundred screaming warriors. Straight up the slope they came, swinging their war-clubs and brandishing their knives. Fear gripped Weston's heart. The target through the door of the rocket seemed infinitely small. But the woman's hand on his arm steadied him.

"Even now you will save us, Vola," she breathed in his ear with a quick intake of breath. "They cannot win. You are Vola of the gods. My faith is stronger than myself. The thunder and fire will come at your will."

Weston's muscles grew taut; his eyes cleared; the pistol steadied; a great peace and calm came over the man of Earth. Yes, he would save her, though he was not of the gods. Silently he prayed that the "thunder and fire" would answer to his call.

The Nacos covered the slope below the rocket and they were coming fast. The pistol in Weston's hand grew very still; the front and rear sights lined with the point of fire that was the ignition switch; the report of the gun sounded above the cries of the savages. Then a hundred thunders broke loose; a streak of livid fire shot down the slope sweeping all before it. A powerful gust of displaced air whipped Weston and Queen Saga back from the brink of the cliff as though they were straws; small stones and dust rained down in showers everywhere.

Far up in the heavens the great beam of light died away with the distant mutterings of thunder. Tiny eddies of whirling air brushed the two prone figures on the ridge top.

Silence reigned again. Weston and Queen Saga crawled back to the cliff brink and looked below. Heaps of torn-up soil were scattered about below the point where the rocket had rested. A great rent was torn in the forest at the edge of the valley. An uprooted, giant tree-trunk wavered and fell as they looked. No sign of the enemy was presented until they had watched some time, then they saw an arm move up and down from where it was thrust out of a heap of stones. A ghastly body hung from the limb of a tree. It clung for some time high above the ground, then broke loose and fell to the ground. All movement and sound ceased. Weston turned to the woman and took her in his arms.

"The prophecy has been fulfilled," he told her with a voice that trembled. "Thank Heaven I had the strength to do it. And now I must tell you that I am only a man; that I never came from the gods; that I am even lower than you in all that God intended us to be."

A guttural voice from behind startled them. Weston and the woman turned about. Mulick stood glowering at them a short distance away. And in the moment that he saw him Weston knew that Mulick had heard his last words and that the inevitable had arrived—he would have to fight the primitive battle for the possession of the queen.

"I have heard you say you are only a man," growled Mulick. "Your fire and thunder are gone—the gods give you no more magic power. I would have the woman for my own. Throw away the magic at your belt and meet me tooth to tooth."

The slow fire in Weston's breast burst into a mighty conflagration. Trembling with a strange eagerness, he unbuckled the automatic from his waist and threw it far out into the wreckage below the ridge. He crouched. Slowly the two men circled.

Mulick tried to close in. Weston fenced, struck him square upon the jaw and the savage went down. Bleeding at the mouth, Mulick was up again. The crafty circling began again, while Queen Saga watched with burning eyes.

At close quarters Mulick struck Weston on the side of the face with the flat of his hand. Weston was caught slightly off his guard and was knocked off his feet. Mulick leaped in to follow up his advantage. The two men rolled on the ground, writhing and twisting. Mulick strove to strangle Weston, but the man of Earth doubled his legs upon the stomach of his adversary and thrust him off with a quick, strong straighten-

ing of his legs. Again the two stood erect and facing one another.

A sharp stone had cut Weston's forehead during the scrimmage on the ground. His face and breast were covered with blood from the wound and the long slash in his arm was bleeding anew. Eyes gleaming and teeth bared, he crouched, ready for the onslaught of his rival.

They closed again. Weston tripped Mulick, but to his own undoing. From his knees the Cluni swept Weston's legs from beneath him with his forearms and Weston fell upon his stomach with face away from the Cluni, who now held Weston's legs close to his breast. Using Weston's legs as a lever and the ground as a fulcrum, Mulick strove to break his opponent's spine.

Queen Saga picked up a stone and tried to batter Mulick's head, but Weston stopped her.

"Stand back," he cried hoarsely, "back, back!" She obeyed, but hid her eyes from the sight of his seeming sure death.

But Weston drew upon strategy. Mulick was leaning far forward and straining over in that direction. Though the pain in his back was excruciating, Weston suddenly twisted to one side and precipitated Mulick upon his face. In a trice the surprised Mulick was on his feet and snarling.

Almost exhausted, the men clenched again. With tooth and nail and brute strength, they now fought, neither with any thought of strategy. Straining, sweating, bleeding, snarling, they weaved about the rim of the ridge. On and on they strained to conquer until their muscles would not answer to the urge of their wills.

Panting and reeling, they broke apart and wavered drunkenly before one another. Mulick fell upon Weston with hands searching for hair and fingers for eyes. Weston stepped back, then launched himself forward with all his remaining strength—and the man of Mars went over backward, with Weston upon him. Slowly they wriggled over the ground until Mulick's head hung over the crown of the ridge. Weston clenched his hands and pushed down upon Mulick's head. The tension grew terrific. Sweat ran in streams from both bodies, Mulick's head bent farther and farther over the sharp edge of the bank. A low, dull snap sounded, and Mulick lay very still and limp. Rolling off the inert figure, Weston pushed it over the brink of the ridge and dropped panting upon his back. Quickly Queen Saga came forward and gathered his head in her arms.

"You see that I am not of God more than you," he gasped out. "I am only a man and I am yours—you are mine—I have won you. I will tell you soon of my people and how much greater your people are than mine."

"My mate." Her voice came low and her inflection was scarcely coherent, but Weston heard. "You have fought the man's fight with the man's weapons," she went on. "You are the better man. I am proud of you and I am glad that you are not of the gods' terrible making."

For a long time Weston lay in her arms with eyes closed. The Flaming Orb shed its soft, red radiance over all. A low tramp of many feet sounded in the forest below the ridge; a low chanting of voices came to the ears of the two on the ridge. A large band of Cluni came out of the forest directly and Queen Saga hailed them from the ridge. They came on shouting the news that the Nacos had fled in fear of the thunder and fire of the rocket as it left on its unguided journey into space.

EPILOGUE

FORTY thousand miles from Earth a steel body plunged through the infinite, carrying an invaluable creation into eternity. Onward the rocket rushed through untrammeled space. By star and planet, satellite and atom; through light and darkness—onward it roared. nor once fell the halting power of any planet's gravity. On it forged until the last charge of gas blew out

Then, three hundred thousand miles from the abode of life and substance, the great rocket, spent of energy, halted motionless in the heavens; there to remain hanging in space until the crack of Doom. THE END

Prowler Who Paid for Food Dies in "Haunted" Attic

FINIS was written to a tale worthy of Edgar Allan Poe, in Rockland Lake, N. Y., recently.

Since last June a little two-room frame cottage, owned by the Palisade Interstate Park commission and rented out to campers has been a topic of discussion. There were stories of queer noises in the place and rumors that the house was haunted. Two families moved out in short order because of inexplicable incidents.

Food in the house had a strange way of disappearing. Supplies of foodstuffs diminished gradually and very mysteriously in the night or in the absence of the family. Traps set for a supposed intruder were unavailing. Locks were changed and doors and windows barred, but the depredations continued and the manner of the invader's comings and goings could not be discovered.

On August 6, a check for two dollars was found on the dining-room table. Under it was a note, signed "Alexander P. Achimore," saying the check was in payment for food he had taken. It was cashed and found to be good.

Since shortly before September 1, disagreeable odors about the house have forced one family after another to move out. Only a short time ago the newest tenant climbed into the dark, low-ceiled attic and found the decomposed body of a man about forty years old wedged in the rafters. A physician said the man, believed to have been Achimore, had been dead about eight weeks.

A Ghost Story
That Mounts to a Vivid Climax

THE TAP

By ARTHUR EDWARDS CHAPMAN

MENTALLY I cursed the tap.

If I had risen once to turn it off, I had risen half-a-dozen times during the last quarter of an hour, and still the disconcerting *drip, drip, drip* continued.

This was my first night in the new flat, and after Mrs. Biggs, who came to do the cleaning and prepare my meals, had wished me "Good-night," I had settled down to run off a short article which I had promised to deliver by morning.

The words had flowed from my pen with scarcely an effort, and probably for this very reason the incident stands out in my memory more vividly than would otherwise have been the case. I recollect that I had paused in my writing to consider more deeply a certain point in my article. Glancing up at the clock, I had noticed the hands indicating a quarter to eleven, and as I took up my pen afresh I heard that *drip, drip, drip* of the tap in the bathroom. For a few minutes I paid no attention to the sound, and continued writing, but presently it became so loud and insistent that I found myself counting the drops unconsciously.

Drip, drip, drip. . . .

"A loose washer," I said to myself. "I'll get a plumber tomorrow!"

Rising, I proceeded to the bathroom and turned the tap off so far as I was able. Then I went back to my desk; but barely had I picked up my pen than the sound recommenced.

Drip, drip, drip. . . .

I tried to ignore it; but without success. The very quietness of the building seemed to intensify the noise until to listen to it became painful. I must have gone at least four times to try and screw the confounded thing off, and as surely as I returned to my chair, believing I had fixed it, just as surely would that dripping begin anew.

With an exclamation of annoyance, I rose to my feet once more. And then, suddenly, I became aware that the *drip, drip, drip* was changing slowly, gradually, to a full rush of water as though someone were turning on the tap to its fullest extent.

In surprise, I hurried to the bathroom, and as I approached the door I heard the little window blow open with a loud *bang*, and a great gust of air enfolded me, air of so icy a coldness that I shivered involuntarily.

Grumbling at the carelessness of Mrs. Biggs in leaving the window unfastened, I closed it hastily and made it secure, shooting home the tiny bolt that a previ-

ous tenant had for some reason placed on the bottom frame. After stopping the tap, which, by some strange freak, had turned itself on, I closed the bath-room door and returned to my work with a renewed resolve to send for the plumber on the morrow.

It was some time, however, before I was able fully to concentrate again, for I kept breaking off to listen for that *drip, drip, drip.* I listened in vain; for the tiresome sound was not renewed, and, though I wrote for at least an hour longer, I did not hear it again that night.

NEXT morning, I put my resolve into practice, and in due course my friend the plumber arrived. After spending considerable time in the bath-room he came in to report to me,

"Didn't seem to be anything wrong, sir," he assured me. "But I've put a new washer on, and it'll be right enough now, sir. I'll bob in again, though, just to see it's goin' proper."

Apparently he was right, for I did not hear the tap at all during the day. Once, after Mrs. Biggs had gone, I visited the bathroom to inspect the job, and was quite convinced that the dripping would not cause me further inconvenience. Also I took the opportunity of seeing that the bathroom window was securely fastened, and, thus satisfied, I returned to my study.

I had got thoroughly warmed up to my work and was totally oblivious to everything but the scratch of my pen as it sped across the smooth surface of the paper. All else seemed wrapped in a quietness like that of a tropical night, a quietness paradoxically emphasized by the multitude of familiar sounds that, strangely enough, fail to impress themselves upon one's mind solely by reason of their very insistence.

The ticking of the clock on the wall before me; the falling of an occasional coal from the grate, these and other commonplace noises served only to heighten the deadly stillness of my room.

Then, suddenly, as I wrote, I became conscious of a new sound, an accompaniment, it seemed, to the scratch of my pen.

Drip, drip, drip. .

It pierced the silence like a rapier pierces a heart; it forced itself upon me so harshly that I dropped my pen and stuffed my fingers into my ears to shut it out. As I did so I raised my head and found myself gazing with a feeling akin to fear at the clock.

It was exactly a-quarter to eleven!

For an instant I stared, and a cold shiver ran down my spine. Was it merely coincidence, or was there something uncanny about the tap? A quarter to eleven!

Slowly, fearfully I turned my head toward the door, half expecting to see some awful apparition come gliding through. Then I laughed, somewhat nervously I must admit, at my childish dread, and got sharply to my feet. Hang it all! my nerves were all on edge. I was working too hard; a rest would do me good. . . .

Drip, drip, drip. . . .

Nothing strange about *that*, surely! I thought. I would have it out with my friend the plumber, all the same. . . . . Meanwhile, I must try and check the dripping. . . .

As I entered the bath-room the tap, seeming to protest against my interference, began to drip faster, and I reached out my hand to stop it. Then I felt a peculiar stinging, burning sensation of intense cold across the backs of my hands as though someone were passing a piece of ice over them, and the knob of the tap began slowly to unscrew itself.

It was weird, uncanny—I cannot adequately describe it. I tried to resist that unseen force, but was powerless against it. Nor could I withdraw my hands from the tap. They were numb with that icy coldness, and pressed as by invisible fingers against the metal, while the screw slowly turned round and round before my very eyes, and the drip, drip became a swift dribble.

And then an awful, nameless terror took possession of me. I strove to flee, but could not. I turned my head away, but some strange power impelled me to return my gaze to the tap that kept on slowly turning . . . turning. . . .

My heart beat madly against my ribs —I was hot and cold alternately—I think I went mad and struggled wildly to escape that horrible influence. Then, as the screw reached its limit and the water gushed forth, the little window suddenly was flung open and an icy blast met me and sent me staggering back against the wall.

For a few minutes I leaned there, striving to steady my racked nerves and collect my scattered wits. But now all was still and quiet save for the rushing of the water.

Mechanically, I crossed to the basin and turned the tap off, afterward closing and fastening the window. Now I was able to think more calmly and endeavored to probe the mystery of this strange happening. But, try as I would, I could not explain it.

I had always been a skeptic where spiritualism was concerned, and yet. . .

THE next day passed quite as usual, and though on several occasions I entered the bath-room there was no indication of anything out of the ordinary about the place. The tap was behaving just as any self-respecting tap should.

During the evening I received a visit from an old college chum, Ralph Gratrix. In the old days we had fought many a wordy battle on matters relating to psychic research, for Gratrix was a keen student of the subject, whereas I, as I have intimated, was openly a scoffer.

Remembering this, I took the opportunity of telling him of my experience of the previous night.

When I had finished my tale Gratrix was silent for a space. Then he turned and looked at me queerly and said, rather irrelevantly, I thought:

"D'you remember the Goldstone murder which created such a sensation some six months ago?"

I said I had a slight recollection of the affair. A certain theatrical manager of the name of Goldstone had murdered his wife in a fit of jealousy, wasn't it?

"Yes," Gratrix agreed slowly "Well, the crime was committed—in this flat."

Now it was my turn to stare curiously.

"In this flat!" I repeated, taking out my cigarette-case and offering it to him.

Gratrix nodded,

"Let me refresh your memory a little," he said, lighting up. "This Goldstone was known to be insanely jealous of his young wife. It was said that he suspected her of being unduly interested in a certain actor who was then playing lead in Goldstone's company.

"Well, one night, a Sunday it was, Goldstone was returning to his flat when he passed the actor in the street. Immediately Goldstone's jealousy was aroused. In his mind there was but one explanation: His wife had taken advantage of his absence to receive her lover—"

"Oh, I seem to remember that," I interrupted. "It was proved afterwards that the actor had just left some friends further up the street in whose company he had been all the evening. Wasn't that so?"

"Yes, you're right," Gratrix said. "But Goldstone didn't know that. All he thought of was the supposed faithlessness of his wife. His previous suspicions seemed to be more than justified. . . . And he entered the flat with murder in his heart. His wife was just retiring, and had gone into the bathroom for a glass of water which she was in the habit of taking last thing at night. She had just turned on the tap—mark this well—and was reaching for the glass when Goldstone burst in upon her—"

Gratrix paused and gazed into the fireplace.

"That would be some time just before eleven," he said reflectively.

"Just before eleven?" I shot the question suddenly. "That's the time the tap starts to drip!"

My friend nodded his head slowly and continued:

"She hadn't time to fill the glass before Goldstone had her by the throat! . . . You know the rest. . . . A policeman heard her scream and forced an entry. . . . But it was too late!"

He finished speaking, and bent to poke the dying fire into a last despairing flame. I gazed at him half doubtfully.

"Then you think—?" I began.

"I believe," he said deliberately, "that the spirit of the dead woman is seeking to complete the action which the mind conceived but the body was unable to carry out."

"You mean that the thought uppermost in the woman's mind when death overtook her was to obtain a glass of water, and that the spirit will not rest in peace until this thought becomes translated into action?"

"Yes," he said; and then stopped short, listening intently.

I had heard the sound also, and knew that the hour had come. Glancing quickly at the clock, I saw that it was a quarter to eleven, and as the *drip, drip, drip* slowly became louder I felt something of that fear of the previous night returning.

Gratrix rose sharply and flung his half-consumed cigarette into the fireplace, a strange, far-off look in his eyes.

"Come," he said quietly, and I followed him, not without some misgivings, to the bath-room.

As he pushed open the door my eyes instinctively sought out the tap, and I saw that it was slowly turning. . . turning.

For an instant my friend watched in silence; then suddenly he crossed to the basin and taking a glass from the shelf above, held it under the tap which now was running swiftly.

Wonderingly I watched him, shivering a little as I felt an icy wave pass by me. But Gratrix did not appear to notice anything, and placing the glass, now full, on the basin, he came quickly to my side.

"Watch," he said simply.

Together we gazed at that glass of water and then with a shock I realized that it was moving! Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, it began to float upward as though raised by an invisible hand. Fascinated, horrified, I watched its upward course, and I think I would have rushed forward had not my companion held me back with a warning arm.

Higher the glass went, and that invisible hand began to tilt it so that it seemed as if the contents must be spilled to the floor. No drop fell, however. Instead, I saw the water slowly disappearing, vanishing into the air until the last drop was gone.

I felt my head throbbing, my heart began to race. I could stand it no longer, and with a cry I flung aside my friend's restraining hand and darted wildly forward. With a loud crash, the window burst open, and as I fell back before the fierceness of that inrush of air, the glass, freed from the invisible power, tumbled to the floor where it shattered in a hundred fragments.

With an effort I calmed myself and turned to Gratrix, who still was standing with his back against the wall, a vacant look in his eyes and a faint smile of understanding and relief on his lips.

"What—what was it?" I stammered. "What does it mean?"

Quietly he answered as he turned toward me:

"It means. . . . that the unexpressed thought has become an actuality. The spirit will trouble you no more!"

MY friend the plumber came, as he had promised, to see how his job had gone on.

"Well, sir," he said, "I dare bet as how that tap ain't drippin' now, eh?"

I smiled thoughtfully.

"No," I replied slowly; "it doesn't drip. . . . now!"

"I thought as how I'd fix it!" he exclaimed with professional pride. "What I don't know about taps ain't worth wastin' breath on!"

A Mysterious Picture

IN THE late summer of 1922 there was displayed in Shreveport, La., a phenomenon that no one could explain and that is yet an unsolved mystery. It was a clearly recognizable picture—in appearance very like a photographic negative—of one Mrs. Dortion, as she lay dead in a room of a country home where she died December 14, 1921, near Campti, La.

The picture is outlined on the mirror of a dresser that was in the room where she lay, and shows the head, face and part of the bust quite plainly, as also some of the cot and its drapery that constituted her bier, and something, not very distinct, but from its mass and location, apparently a bunch of flowers that had been placed in her hand. Strangely, the picture is perpendicular on the mirror to the horizontal position of her body. The likeness did not develop until some months after her demise. It was in July that her niece was one day quite startled by its appearance. Many visitors went to view the discovery at the home, and it was later put on exhibition in Shreveport, its genuineness being established beyond question, no process of erasure having any effect upon it, while every cause at all plausible was advanced to account for it. Persons of all classes were among the observers, but unless the occurrence, at the time and place of her death, of an electrical storm, as was recalled by people of that community, was in some way a factor, the origin of this most remarkable picture could not be determined.

A Story of Horrifying Mystery

The Thing That Should Not Be

By BURTON PETER THOM

IT IS hardly necessary to recall the "laboratory murders" of two years ago. In the annals of crime they have remained unique, not only because of the absolute absence of motive, but also because of the utter inability of the police and the most expert private investigators to offer even the slightest suggestion in the way of their solution.

While I am well aware that there have been many unsolved crimes in the past that perhaps have equaled these in mystery, I am quite certain that there has been none which approached them in the lack of incriminating facts pointing to any particular person. For that reason these murders have afforded a fascinating study to students of criminology and to all others interested in the detection of crime.

Although no official explanation of these murders has ever been forthcoming, I can state here that within six weeks of their occurrence their solution was accomplished and the murderer was punished. For reasons which cannot be entered upon here, this was not made public, but the time has now come when a full account of the mystery can be given.

I am a physician, and for a number of years I have been Director of Pathology in the Stoneman Institute for Medical Research, which explains my acquaintance with the late Dr. Dalton and the late Dr. Bray and my connection with this particular case.

The events which preceded the first murder, that of Dr. Bray, can be briefly described as follows:

All of the laboratories of the Institute close at five o'clock. Dr. Bray, however, had left at noon, and after luncheon had gone directly to the Academy of Medicine, where he stayed until nearly six o'clock, reading some French journals which had just arrived. The last to leave the laboratory was Wilson, the orderly, who left shortly after six.

At nine-thirty in the evening, Dr. Bray returned. He spoke to the night watchman at the door and was taken to the fourth floor in the elevator by one of the assistant watchmen. There was nothing unusual in this, for Dr. Bray frequently worked alone in the laboratory at night. This man saw him enter and close the door. He was the last to see him alive. These movements were all rigidly established at the subsequent investigation of the crime.

Wilson, the orderly, came on duty at eight o'clock the next morning. When he punched the time clock the doorman remarked that Dr. Bray was still in the laboratory, as the night watchman had told him that he had come in during the night and had not seen him go out. Wilson found the door of the laboratory unlocked and the electric lights lit. He passed around the long table, which occupied two thirds of the middle length of the room, and at the farther end saw Dr. Bray's dead body.

He immediately ran out into the corridor and called for help. When Dr. Dalton and I arrived we found the place in an uproar and the police in charge.

The body of Dr. Bray was lying on its back. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. Nearby, as if dropped by the murderer in his haste to get away, was a blood-stained microtome blade, which Wilson remembered having left on the table the afternoon before for the purpose of sharpening it. The body was completely exsanguinated, although the amount of blood on the floor, while considerable, would hardly show this. The discrepancy was accounted for by seepage into the porous material of the floor.

There were some smudges on the shirt front, and the three upper buttons of the vest were out of their button holes. The head had evidently been pulled back with considerable force, so as to allow the blood to flow more freely from the severed vessels. *Rigor mortis* had set in, which showed that death had occurred at least four or five hours before, probably longer. That the attack had been unexpected was evident by the upturned microscope on the table, with the slide still held in place by the mechanical stage. I might also add that the position of the body and the nature of the wound absolutely excluded the possibility of suicide.

The investigation at the scene of the crime was conducted by Inspector Grogan and Medical Examiner Malloy. It was most efficient and painstaking and left nothing to be desired in the way of an intelligent scrutiny of the facts. Several hours elapsed before the investigation was finished, but no arrests were made either then or later. There were no grounds for such action. Although they did not admit it, the police were baffled. It was a nine-days' wonder in the newspapers, which only served to give the Institute much undesirable publicity, then it was forgotten by the public.

SATURDAY is a half holiday, and the laboratory is deserted after one o'clock. On the second Saturday following the murder Dr. Dalton did not leave with the rest of us, but remained to complete some dissections which he had begun earlier in the day.

The tragedy of a few weeks ago was still fresh in our minds, and I and the other members of the staff urged him not to stay, or, if he did, to have some one remain with him. He would not have it. He would be through before three o'clock, he said, and it was impossible to suppose that the horrible deed of a few weeks ago would be repeated. So he stayed.

When the doorman was relieved by the night watchman he told him that Dr. Dalton was still in the laboratory; remembering what had occurred, they both went to the fourth floor and knocked on the door. There was no response, and they entered the room.

Dr. Dalton was lying in front of the sink—dead. A hatchet was fastened in the back of his head and his throat was deeply gashed. A large knife, of the kind usually called a "butcher knife," was lying beside him. It was stained with blood.

The horror and excitement this second murder inspired can be well imagined. The hatchet and knife belonged in the laboratory, which proved that the murderer had not come prepared to kill with weapons of his own choosing, but had seized upon those nearest at hand.

A peculiar feature, which was also noted with the microtome blade used to kill Dr. Bray, was that none of these instruments of death showed any marks of finger prints. Rubber gloves could have been used, but it was definitely established that they were not.

As before, the police could learn nothing, although I am sure they tried. No one now ever remained in the laboratory alone. When the orderly came in the morning, two guards always stayed with him until the staff arrived. All left together at five o'clock.

About two weeks after the death of Dr. Dalton, when the orderly and guards came on duty, they were surprised to find that one of the four monkeys that had recently been acquired for experimental purposes in the study of certain phases of sleeping sickness, was dead on the floor with its throat cut. That the monkey had been killed in the same manner as the two physicians could not but give the impression that the same cause was responsible.

The killing of the poor monkey was to me more mysterious than the killing of the two men. When a human being is slain by another there is always a motive. That motive may be hate or greed or fear, but to take the life of a caged and harmless beast, and to take it cruelly by stealth, why—reason stops. This incident, trivial in its way, gripped my imagination and I realized, as I had not before, how malign and horrible and secret the significance of this bloody enigma must be.

All day I thought about it, and when I left the laboratory I had come to a decision. The problem could not be solved by the logical processes of deduction. Its solution could be reached only by the less obvious but more direct process of intuition—the reasoning of the subconscious, and that required imagination, and imagination to a superlative degree. The decision that I had come to was to call in Dr. Finley.

He is the most remarkable personality I know. A successful East Side practitioner, not on the teaching staff of any college and holding only an obscure hospital appointment, he is the ablest diagnostician in the country today. For he has the gift, the rare and precious one which the high gods bestow but to the favored few, and which makes them truly great—imagination.

I called him up after dinner. He would be glad to see me if I called after nine in the evening when his office hours were over. It had been my habit to spend an evening with him once or twice a month for a number of years, because he is one of the few men whose conversation I always find stimulating. Unlike most one-book men—and his one book is Medicine—he is not dull or uninformed when he talks outside his subject. He knows other things as well. I have often wondered where and how he gets his information on so many varied and often abstruse topics. Perhaps it is because he runs to the full the creeping hours of time.

Finley's knowledge of the murders was that which he had obtained from reading the daily papers. The information I gave to him was first-hand. He listened intently with his chin sunk upon his chest. Suddenly he looked up and spoke

"The killing of the two men and the monkey occurred at intervals of two weeks apart, and in each instance the great vessels—the carotids and the jugulars—were severed and death was caused by hemorrhage. Was the amount of blood on the floor sufficient to cause complete exsanguinity, or was it not? Answer this question very carefully, because I believe it is most important."

It was strange that he asked this; it had been in my mind also. The blood on the floor had never been enough to cause death by exsanguinity. It had puzzled me at the time, but the detectives had attached no significance to it. I finally attributed it to seepage into the floor.

The peculiar fingerprint impressions on the microtome blade, the handle of the knife and of the hatchet also interested him greatly. Later in the evening I told him of the wonderful work that Bray and Dalton had been doing and which had been interrupted by their untimely death. He listened with rapt attention as I told him how they were able to keep tissue elements alive indefinitely and the bizarre results they had achieved in "building up" forms with diverse animal parts. He asked many questions pertaining to these which displayed a knowledge of anatomy and physiology that surprised me. Before I left he promised to visit the laboratory as soon as he had the opportunity to do so.

IT was not until five days later that Dr. Finley came, and I then had another strange incident to relate to him. When the monkey was found dead I ordered that the surviving animals be removed to an adjoining room, which was kept locked except when they were fed and their cages cleaned. There were six rabbits, however, which were allowed to remain. On the morning that Dr. Finley visited the laboratory all of them were found dead with their throats torn either by teeth or claws, and, although they were completely drained of blood, there was very little blood on the floor.

His eyes glinted and narrowed when I told him this, and his face broke into a faint smile, but he made no comment. He examined the laboratory with care, but his interest was mostly centered in the specimens of living tissue and the examples of reconstructed vertebral types. These seemed to fascinate him; as indeed they would have fascinated most any one, showing, as they did, not only a knowledge of anatomy and physiology more profound than was hitherto thought possible, but a plastic surgical skill that was marvelous in technic and amazing in results.

When he left he told me that I would hear from him shortly. Two days later he called me on the telephone and asked me to come to see him that evening.

"Have you solved the problem?" I asked anxiously as we shook hands.

"I think I have," he answered quietly. "At least the conclusion I have reached is plausible, and whatever is plausible is always possible."

As soon as we were comfortably settled, with pipes alight, he asked me if I had a pistol. "I haven't, and I think we'll need one."

It so happened that I had one and the permit which made it lawful for me to carry it.

"Fine," he replied. "We'll take it with us when we go to the laboratory tomorrow night."

During the remainder of my stay he persistently evaded letting me know what his conclusion was. That there was a possibility of violence was evident by his request for a deadly weapon. That was as far as he would commit himself. He instructed me to put the monkeys back into the laboratory and to have a blanket or sheet hung across the alcove, where the thermostats stood, to conceal us while we watched. Our vigil was to commence as soon as the staff left.

Promptly at five-thirty Dr. Finley was announced over the telephone. He came in as the staff was leaving. I had not informed them of our plan, and when they saw that he and I intended to remain they knew that something was going on, but I shook my head to enjoin silence and they went without voicing the questions I knew they would like to ask.

At a sign from Finley I handed the pistol—a thirty-two calibre automatic—to him. Without speaking, we tiptoed behind the curtain in front of the alcove and sat down. I leaned over to whisper to him, but he put his finger to his lips.

Silently we watched and waited. Slowly the daylight changed to twilight and then the moon came out. I could see her pale beams above the curtain. Occasionally we could hear the monkeys moving in their cages and every now and then one of them would give a squeak.

Faint and far away the sounds of the street came to us; the piping voices of children at play; the whirl of automobiles and the clang of the surface cars. For a while a phonograph played in a nearby house. The music was popular songs and jazz, but it sounded eerie and weird. Finally it stopped and the noises gradually became fainter and fainter; the only sounds were those made by the passing of the surface cars and an occasional belated automobile as it rushed up the avenue.

The monkeys were asleep and still. As the night wore on it seemed to me that my senses were no longer attuned to sound and time, although I was wide awake.

Suddenly Finley clutched my hand. Instantly I was alert; I could have heard a pin drop, but what I heard was the slight creaking of a door moving on its hinges.

Then came a muffled thud as the door struck against the wall. Something seemed to drop, followed by a scratching patter on the floor.

The monkeys began to chatter excitedly. Something seemed to jump on the ledge in front of their cages. The chattering increased, and above it came the high, shrill scream of one of the little beasts in mortal pain or terror.

The scratching sound was heard again, then silence.

FINLEY stood up. He brushed aside the curtain and we strode into the room. At the far end, near where the monkey cages were, a dark form crouched. It was no larger than a child and its back was turned toward us, but in the moonlight we could see that it held a monkey in its arms and its teeth champed at its throat.

At the sound of our approach, it turned and looked. Its eyes glowed red, like living coals, its lips were dripping blood. Its face was that of a fiend from hell.

One look—and I knew. Dropping the limp monkey on the floor, it stood erect and advanced a step, then—a flash, a report, a smell of acrid smoke, and the thing crumpled into a heap and lay still.

With the automatic still in his hand, Finley turned to me and said, "Throw on the light and look at the thing that should not be."

DR. FINLEY will tell the rest.

"Shakespeare was right when he said that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. There certainly are, and the perpetrator of the 'laboratory murders' was one of them. I had read about them and heard about them at the time—some people talked of nothing else—but I had not given the slightest thought to their solution until I was asked to do so.

"The police, I knew, were up against a blank wall. That they were unable to fasten the remotest suspicion on any particular person was proved by the fact that they had not made a single arrest. This was unusual. It was unusual because there is nearly always a finger of suspicion that points somewhere, even if it points wrong. In this instance there was not even the trace of a suspicious finger to point. The general, I might say the invariable, rule was broken here, because there is hardly ever a crime committed even by the most astute and cunning criminal that does not leave some sign, however slight, that is indicative of the person, or type of person who committed it. This sign, in the minds of the police at least, was wanting.

"When a crime like murder has been committed, if the murderer is unknown, or if suspected but not proved guilty, it is essential to establish a motive. To know the motive is to know the reason, and if the reason for a crime is known the search for the criminal automatically narrows down to the search for one who would be impelled to act for such a reason.

"Although neither the police nor my friend attached any significance to it, there was one feature that to me was most significant, because to me it seemed to be the motive. That was, the victims were invariably bled to death, yet the amount of blood on the floor did not equal the amount they had lost. To my mind this discrepancy furnished a clue of supreme importance, and I was very much surprised that it was overlooked. For it offered absolute evidence that the blood of the victims was what the murderer desired. The killing of the monkey and the rabbits confirmed this beyond all doubt.

"Now it could be safely assumed that no normal human being would want the blood of another obtained in this manner. This suggested a maniac with cannibalistic tendencies. But the fingerprints impressed on the death-dealing weapons did not correspond with those of a human being. All students of criminology know that fingerprints are an infallible test. Their evidence can never be denied. For that reason the human element could be eliminated.

"Yet the manner in which the crimes were committed showed intelligence. The attacks had occurred when the victims were alone and no one was about to come to their aid. Some of the higher apes, the orang, or the gorilla, might show such intelligence, and these animals have been known murderously to attack men, but they have never been known to exhibit any vampirelike characteristics such as sucking the blood of their kill.

"No animals that would fit this description were confined in the Institute and none was known to be wandering at large. It had been demonstrated in a way that it was impossible to deny that no one had gained entrance into the laboratory with homicidal intent. It was natural, therefore, to infer that the assassin was to be found in the laboratory. But he was not—at least by the police. If he was in the laboratory, unable to escape, he would have to hide therein.

"If there had been only one murder I would have concluded that there was some flaw in the police theory that the murderer had not gained entrance into the laboratory. I would have reasoned that in some unexplained, or rather, undetected way, the murderer had done so and had long ago escaped; but the second murder and the seemingly meaningless slaying in an exactly identical manner of the harmless little beasts made it impossible not to believe that the murderer was still concealed in the laboratory.

"I thus satisfied myself as to the motive and the locality where the murderer must be concealed. It was now necessary to identify him.

"When I was formally asked to try to solve this dreadful mystery, my friend mentioned, quite incidentally, the intensely interesting and surprising results which had attended the researches of Bray and Dalton in constructive biology and plastic surgery. When I visited the laboratory I was permitted to see these truly wonderful accomplishments. That animal tissue, composed as it is of innumerable cells of most delicate and highly specialized structure, could be made to live, and not only live but also increase in volume if so permitted, outside of the body from which it was derived was a stupendous biologic triumph. But that did not compare with the other marvels shown.

"These were nothing more or less than new forms of animals, composites of different types and widely separated genuses in the zoologic scale, that had been welded together as it were into one. Grotesque and bizarre were these man-

created shapes. But they were purely vegetative, they existed and no more, the vital spark which we call life was lacking. Close as they had come they had not penetrated Nature's greatest secret—Life.

"One of these shapes in particular attracted my attention. It was the most horrible parody on brute creation that it was possible to conceive. It was like no living creature on earth or in the waters under the earth.

"The body was that of a large and powerful dog, probably a mastiff, as it was covered with a coat of coarse, tawny hair. The abdomen, however, was white and scaly like the belly of a reptile. The legs were those of a big monkey—a baboon I would say. The arms were disproportionately long and their knotted muscles were covered with thick, reddish hair. The hands were sinewy, black and apelike. Both arms and hands were evidently those of a young orang. The face resembled nothing so much as a hideous gargoyle, the nightmare dream of some mad mediaeval artist. The head of a leopard had been used, and by the plastic skill of the surgeon the features had been transformed into a revolting, feline caricature of a human face. The ensemble of horror was completed by a hairless, tapering, reptilian tail.

"While I gazed on this devilish insult to man and beast and their Creator a strange thing happened. Strange, in that it set in motion the train of thought that enabled me to supply the unknown quantity of the problem that I had attempted to solve. I had the motive, the location, it gave me the identity of the murderer. In its outward seeming it was most commonplace, but Fate, or, rather, Fate's Master, not infrequently acts so and we call it chance. A fly—a big, bluebottle fly, one of the survivors of last year's myriads, alighted on the eyelid of the thing. Instantly its eye opened, it winked and and a black and hairy hand was raised to brush away the irritation. By that I knew it lived. It was not a mere vegetative automaton endowed only with the basic reflexes of breathing and the action of the heart, it possessed instinct and reasoning, else it would not have brushed away the fly. Whence came its life?

"There are those who believe that there are other spirits or intelligences who do not inhabit the bodies of men. I am one of those who hold this ancient doctrine. These discarnate intelligences have never been clothed in flesh, yet to be so is ever their desire. Into this house of flesh without a tenant, this thing that should not be, an evil spirit crept. That which was lifeless thus became alive. Urged by the instinct of its carnivore brain, it was not satisfied by a diet of serum or citrated blood injected into the great vein of the neck every few days. Blood, blood fresh and warm only, could give strength and vigor; so it slew to get it."

Another Creepy Story by Burton Peter Thom Will Appear in an Early Issue of WEIRD TALES. It is Called "The Statement of Archibald Swayne," and It's an Eerie Yarn. Watch for It.

THE GHOST

By MARY SHARON

There is a ghost that walks for me,
A Presence that I dread;
The Spirit of the Youth I was,
Before my dreams were dead.

I sit before my study fire,
While shadows writhe along the wall,
And Spirit hands rap on the door,
And ghostly feet glide down the hall.

Outside my window, lifeless trees
Lift fleshless fingers to the sky;
The night wind whistles eerily,
Its moaning echoes will not die.

This ghost of mine will not be laid,
Time cannot set me free,
It is the wraith of dear dead days,
That comes to torture me.

THE GUILTY MAN

A Study in Tragedy

By MARION CARRERE

APPEARANCES, as has often been said, are misleading. Many a girl in a fur coat, gold-buckled shoes and an expensive marcel snips ribbon behind a counter; that inoffensive-looking cloud over there may darken and spit forth lightning; your sweet-faced wife may be plotting to deceive you; persons go wrong.

Jeffrey Saubes, sitting with outward placidity on a box before his barn door with a keen-bladed, horn-handled knife in his hand slowly whittling as though his sole aim in life was to model a yacht in perfect miniature, was, in reality, thinking how smoothly that same knife would carve into the heart of his enemy, Philip Loeber.

His hate was a black hate, compounded of jealousy, envy, a sense of inferiority, and fear. It had begun twelve years ago when, the two men owning adjoining farms and having been good friends until then, Philip Loeber commenced to climb and Jeffrey Saubes to go down. Jeffrey drank, but that was his own affair; lots of men took a glass now and then, and made money just the same. But he was driven to borrow money from the more prosperous Philip not once, but again and again, and he grew to hate the man who had befriended him.

Then Martha Hansen came along with her yellow hair and her fresh cheeks and her soft laughing eyes to settle with her uncle on the old Leatherby place. The uncle had fallen from his threshing machine the following year and was killed. There had been a quiet, slow but determined battle for her hand between the two men. Loeber had won.

Although Martha was dead now, and Jeffrey could see the daisies waving in the spring on her grave in the orchard corner over there on his neighbor's land, he had neither forgiven nor forgotten. This was count two.

Also Loeber had given him advice about his habits—advice which Jeffrey, growing more and more aloof and bitter-hearted and weasel-faced and grim for the smoldering hate in his heart, considered had been offered with a superior air. Count three.

And Loeber had sworn yesterday to have Saubes arrested for stealing a dozen of his fine White Leghorns. It was the fear that followed this threat that had started the whittler's brain on its evil scheming. He would kill him; and he wondered why he had not thought of it before. It would be easy.

Since his wife's death Philip Loeber had lived alone, with only a man-servant who slept, as Jeffrey knew, in a room over the carriage-house a few hundred yards from the back door. When the two farmers had been friends Saubes had often spent the evening talking and smoking with his neighbor. That was before he had become full of hate and had taken to drink. He knew where his enemy slept and that there was only a very simple lock on the outside door downstairs. His knife would get through that easily.

The hired man, a young, melancholy, but on the whole good-natured Dane, would be in his loft by eight o'clock, or nine at the latest. Loeber would be sitting by the fire or preparing for bed, dropping his big boots on the floor and yawning widely after the hard day in the fields.

The man with the knife would come up behind, speak so that the other would turn—it was part of his design that his enemy should see the hand that struck him down—and the knife would be in his heart before he could cry out. . . .

The man in the sun, whittling at the miniature ship, smiled grimly, and with one powerful vicious plunge of the sharp blade cut his work in two like a piece of cheese and flung it aside. His thinking was done.

IT was a propitiously dark night, black as Jeffrey Saubes' soul and as full of turmoil. A night full of the *ah's* and *oh's* of wind-tortured trees that bent curiously down to see the man who was going to kill his friend.

It was March, and the water in the creek that ran between the two farms was high and noisy, rushing through the darkness as if anxious to be away from the menacing meadows of the little wood and the big dark man who crossed heavily over the uncertain bridge. Some new-born lambs cried pitifully from the sheepfold and a coyote howled in answer. A streak of moon peered out fearfully and disappeared.

Approaching his victim's house, he looked up and saw that the farm-hand was moving about in his room. Undressing perhaps, already, although it was not yet nine. No, he was moving swiftly back and forth, stooping to lift something, passing the window almost at a run. Suddenly, as though he felt the scrutiny of the man outside, he snatched at the blind and the window was dark.

Whatever he was doing, he was up there and out of the way. Thought Jeffrey Saubes: My work is here, it will soon be over, and I shall be home with my tracks well covered before anything is discovered. I shall be rid of the fool in a little while. How simple a thing murder is, after all!

He meditated, as he crept toward the door he had planned to enter, that suspicion would certainly never fasten on him. He had carried his enmity in his heart like a secret disease and had confided in nobody. The crime would, no doubt, be laid to the robbers and drifters who infested the highway into town. He had no fear that he would be caught, only that he might find his enemy alert and waiting and that the deed might be defeated.

There was a light in the kitchen, as he could see through a slit in the door. Try as he might, it was a very difficult thing to raise the lock with his knife without making a sound, but after a full fifteen minutes he accomplished it. He opened the door, pushing it in softly and cautiously, inch by inch. A creak. He sprang inside.

In the kitchen a lamp was burning, but as far as he could see no one was there. In the bed-room, perhaps. He strode across the bare floor, looking with quick motions of his head to left and right like a jungle beast who expects death to leap from every shadow. Not a sound in the house. And then he saw the body of Philip Loeber, whom he had come to kill, already dead with a knife-jab in his thick red neck and his inert legs sprawling grotesquely.

HE noticed that the room was in confusion. A chair was overturned; the cloth was dragged partly from the table and lay along the floor among a litter of broken china; a blackened log lay on the hearth-rug as if it had been seized for a weapon. He stood gaping like an idiot with the knife in his hand and his eyes riveted to the spectacle of his enemy slain. The work he had come to do was done. He could not move.

Even when he heard a heavy step approaching he could only stand helpless on the spot. Albert, the hired man, tall and blond almost to whiteness, with a smooth, boyish face and the wide-open, brilliantly-blue eyes of a child, came into the room, carrying an old straw suitcase in one hand and his cap in the other. He started on seeing a visitor, and if his face had not been already as white as paper he would have paled.

"Mr. Saubes—for God's sake—Mr Saubes—" He looked with a shuddering glance at the body of his employer that lay between them.

Saubes put his knife away and said deliberately, "Do you know who killed him?"

The man stammered, "But what are you doing here, Mr. Saubes?"

A hard look came over the face of the would-be murderer, but he did not answer. He seemed hunting for words. Suddenly the Dane shut his square jaw with a snap and bright red color flowed into his face. The arteries in his neck stood out, and he pointed a finger that shook with emotion at the other man.

"You—you were his enemy! He told me! You did it. I saw the knife you put away."

"I did not do it," said Jeffrey Saubes quietly.

Albert dropped his suitcase and in the flash of a half-second had an ugly looking revolver leveled at the other man.

"You sit down in that chair. I'm going to telephone for the sheriff. Wait—get that rope from the nail."

Saubes took a quick look at the ominous black mouth of the weapon and pulled down the rope sullenly. In a few minutes he was bound tightly to the chair and was sitting alone with the dead man while he listened to the farm-hand's thick voice speaking into the telephone. He let his head fall to his breast, for suddenly all the energy that had driven him here subsided and left him weary and only desiring rest—sleep.

The Dane came back, striding thunderously in his big boots and sat down opposite his prisoner. For a long time they were silent, the one with his glance on the floor at his feet, sunk in an apparent apathy, and the other with his face averted from the huddle that had been his master. And then slowly, hesitatingly, his big blond head turned and he looked, but with aversion, at the dead man. As he did so, Jeffrey Saubes raised his eyes.

"I thought so, Albert," he threw out with a laugh. "You killed him."

"What? You think that I—Mr. Saubes—"

"You killed him," repeated Saubes. "I am only curious to know why. Do you mind telling me?"

"You think I—"

"I *know* it. Don't lie, boy. When you came in you didn't even go near the body, and you have hardly looked at it since. That's one reason. An innocent man would have gone over to see if he were really dead. You were the color of chalk when you came in and *before* you saw him. Also, I see by your face that I am right. Untie me."

For answer the younger man put his head down on his hands and burst into loud sobbing, and when he raised it again his face was wild and tear-streaked and his big strong frame shook. He was as a child who fears nothing so much as his own sin.

"I did it," he flung out, speaking quickly, "I did it; but I swear by my dear old mother in the fatherland, by my little sister, I didn't mean to. No, I didn't mean to kill him. I—I ain't the kind of fellow can kill anybody, Mr. Saubes."

He got to his feet and stood there wringing his hands.

"It was because of my little sister, Elsa, who works as maid in town. I sent for her from home last year. Seventeen, she is, and pretty—" He shuddered and looked fearfully toward the man he had killed. "He—began paying her attention, and when I asked him what he intended to do he laughed. He just laughed at me."

"And you killed him?"

"We fought, like two men. I called him a name and he struck me and we fought. He was a big man. Stronger than me. He took a knife from the table—it was fixed for supper—and he ran at me. It was me—or him."

Again Jeffrey Saubes laughed. Always his laughter had a sinister, dark note in it. He said lightly, or with an assumption of lightness:

"You'll have a hard time making the police believe your story."

"I know it. I was going to run away. But now I got to hang for that, Mr Saubes, and little Elsa—my mother—" He sat down heavily again with his face hidden in his hands. "Me—" he muttered, "never—never could I hurt a fly—like a girl I am—"

He got up suddenly and came over to untie the ropes, but Saubes stopped him with a sharp word of command.

"Leave them alone. When they come keep your mouth shut. I'm the murderer—not you."

The Dane's eyes opened wide. "You—" he began.

"I came here tonight to kill him. I hated him for years, envied and despised him. I came with my knife in my hand through the neck of woods over the bridge and opened the door with the blade. I planned the whole thing. But for you, my hands would be red now. You killed him in an honest fight over a woman's honor, I wished to put him out of the way because he was richer, more lucky with the women. He lorded it over me. I came to kill him."

"Can I let you hang, Mr. Saubes, for what I did?"

"You'll have to, boy, because I left a note home in case anything happened to me. About my property and that. I'll tell them to get it. I'll swear I came to kill him. In my heart, I had committed the crime a dozen times over. The law would say you were the guilty man, but which one of us is a murderer, you or I?"

Voices and stamping and hurried feet outside, and three burly men came in, grim-faced and hard-eyed and determined. They gave quick, comprehending glances about the room. Advanced to the man in the chair and unbound him.

He stood silently while they put the cold iron circlets around his wrists. He even smiled when the Dane seized his manacled hands and pressed them in a frantic, sobbing goodby.

This Story is Published by Popular Request

The Transparent Ghost*

By ISA-BELLE MANZER

Doctor Daily after sevral months of actual Experience as a medical Physician and in his Experiments had aroused him to the utmost interest to a scientist of credit for having made a liquid fimiliar to a gas. and by In-haling it he could change his whole body Transparent to all the human eyes he could go any place and talk to any one and yet know one could see Him. Some pople think that Doctor Daily was A link of the chain of the Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but of course know one can say that it is True

But the ghost of the Doctor Daily was a mystery and a great surprise To all in the little town of kent-city. The Black Raven was a bad place and Doctor Daily had lost nearly ever cent he had in the world in this Gambleing house as the Doctor was mystified, with greaf over his loss of all. his money He walked down the path-way passed the black raven glimmering in the early morning sun, and let himself out at the gate. gazed at the big white house he had just quitted. the windows of the room he had occupied, and there green blinds were drawn. even the fog had lifted, the general aspect of the place was extremely desolate and dreary he could hardly belive that he had just come frome a warm, cheery dining-room, and the company of jack daw, the rotund. smiling town bully, and to spite this bully, he had a few days a go saved a negro-boy from this bully and his angry mob, and now, when the negro-boy and jack the bully alike had been all but forgotten, he was rescued from suide because of gratitude for that impulsive action. He almost wondered if he were not the victom of a dreap-fean, He put his hands in his pockets. Then Doctor Daily remembered of inhealing the liquid fimiliar Transparent gas. just be fore he had jumped. into the rock river he walked down the street a few blocks untill he came to the carline. There on the corner, of grant-street stood two young chaps from the smith's shoe-store, a book-keeper and a stenographer. and the doctor thot it rather strange that they did not notice his approach. They were speaking of him: "Too bad about Doctor Daily wasn't!" Such a good hearted man and a fine doctor and he was always a good sport at the Black raven to "Yes Sir your wright dock. was a good sort," Have they recovered his body yet?" No, but they should soon for they are now dragging the river." And at that the doctor, grinning, tapped the speaker on the shoulder. He wheeled a round abruptly but with no smile of relief or exclamation of amazement—only a blank stare "What's the matter?" Bob queried his companion. Why I" thot some-body touched me on my shoulder" I did said the Doctor at which thay-both turned and stared. "Well!" Exclaimed Bob the stenographer." did you hear that?-Jim wasn't that for all the world like Doctor Daily's own voice?" the too young men looked at each other and turned as white as aghost them selves "What's the matter with you?" demanded the Doctor. You talk about dragging Rock-River for me and when I can show you too Lads that I'mright here by both of you and you pretend you dont see or know me! Shure you heard my voice!" you both hear and cant you see it me! the two men stood staring with fright for they could hear the voice!" of the Doctor but couldn see know one At that moment The car came along, and the two were almost frantic in their hast to climb aboard the car but Doctor Daily followed them mechanically, forgeting that he lacked the car fare untill the conductor came around To the Doctors surprise, the conductor passed him by with not a word or glance. He saw several people whom he knew and had been their doctor but when the Doctor spoke to them he received no reply but they only came a stare and a look of wonder or fear. What's the matter with me what gone wrong any way with me?" he asked him self at length, what makes them all afraid of me?"

He left the car at the next corner and went into a cafe and neither of the two waters was occupied yet they took no notice of him as he entered. He sat down at a table and before him was a full-length mirror. to see if there was any thing peculiar about his apperance. to the Doctors great suprise, he could not see his own reflection at all. He could see everything but Doctor Daily. "What's the matter with your mirror he demanded. Did you speak, Ida.? know I never said a word. Did you speak, Ada Belle.? know not me. and the waiternees stared at each other. And then Doctor Daily realised in a flash, that the trouble was not with the mirror, nor the to girls nor the street car conductor, nor the book-keeper, nor with anyone but himself the Liquid Fimiliarto Transparent Gas, had made him invisible! and that was why his friends could hear his voice but could not see him; and thinking him drowned. thay belived it was his goat that was talking to them.

With that knowledge came a perfect understanding with the mysterie of this Transparent gas he could be a ghost and haunt the black raven and make thir house a hounted house and the fitting candles and make the doors to open and close and could make himself and his servents invisible, so that he could pursue his own studies and observations undisturbed by the troublesome curiosity and observation of others. Tho He lived and moved in the heart of this busy little city of kent, his isolation was as complete as tho he had been in the middle of the great desert of the west Doctor Daily was astounded overwhelmed by the discovery of the Transparent gas, and that he could make him self a invisible ghost. A dozen different emotions struggled for mastery—anger, indignation, humiliation, terror, mirth—all ran riot in his brain.

I, supose I ought to have some-thing to quiet my nerves! I'm in a pretty pickle now—but -I wonder what I'll come two any way his brain, was in a stupor of terror, but the possibilities of the situation gradually dawnednpon him. Oh, well "I can go anywhere I please; live in the best Hotels, dine at the finest cafes, with out a a cent of cost know one can't keep me out of anywhere! Why I could go onto a bank at the heels of the cashier and make my getaway with twenty-five Tousand

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**We have always believed in judicious editing of manuscripts, but in this instance we feel that any editorial changes would be equivalent to painting a rose. "The Transparent Ghost," therefore, is published exactly as the author wrote it.—Editor*

dollars and old Goudy. the old hoodoo—of the Darn—Black Raven he spoke of his wealth and his adventure's! and how he had cheated the best of them out of their money! maybe old Goudy didn't know what he was talking about. eh Doctor Daily old Boy.!

The Doctor's brain swam. without the trouble and pain of dissolution, he had been changed in to a ghost—a very much alive ghost, a invisible! Transparent ghost with a sense of humor, a fine appetite. and a love of action and excitement.

But just at that moment a troubled look came be fore his eyes and A thot dismayed him, was this Transparent permanent, or would it pass away in a few hour's or a day leaving him plain Doctor Daily. friendless, and flat broke! or would it prove to be a "Future brilliant with possibilities"- that could not apply to a merely temporary state of invisibility. the Doctor looked into the mirror again By gazing very closly he could just discern the faint outline of a human figure—he held his hands close to his body they, too seemed shadowy and indistinct; but when he held Them out at arm's length, they were quite palpable.

He left cafe. deciding that he would go up to the Black-Raven and formulate his plans there, in the morning quiet as they were all down by the river looking for his body, He got on the next car with easy assurance what matter if my pockets is empty! I have no need to fish a nickle now

As the car swung along the Rock River he saw a crowd of women and men and children congregated on the bridge at the spot from which he had leaped the day before there were men in boats and along the bank searching for his body. The humor of the situation struck the Doctor and he left the car to watch them for a while. Tiring of that diversion, he went across to a policeman standing near the bank of the river close to the brigge. hal-o. "Officer," he said "I'm Doctor Daily 'S ghost I jumped off the bridge there yesterday. morning I wish you'd tell them to stop looking for my body. They cant find it and there no use going to all that trouble The Officer stood as if he was paralysed, and the Doctor laughing took the next car up to the Black-Raven

The big Gambling room over-looking the river was deserted save for old Goudy and he sat in a corner and nursed his knees. a worried expression on his face. on one of the Gambling table's lay the morning papers Doctor Daily, glancing over them, saw the account of his own suicide, and he now understood why old Goudy was worried. it was hinted that the unforunate young Doctor had been in financial difficulties for which a certain fashionable gambling house was primarily responsible. and as old Goudy nursed his knees the Doctor meditated in silence. and the Doctor wondered if he might not find an opening way up at the top of the black raven just then the manager entered in the room quitly. "Well? queried Goudy Have they found docks body yet? "No," "I'mvery sorry! I had no idea that Doctor Daily would take it to heart as he did or I'd not have carried the game so far," Well, you better be sorry; snapped jones. "And on the Anioux seat as well! jake and bill johnson. and several others were Talking abut the way you got Docks money this morning and they're mad clean thru. jake and bill swears you'ren cheat and the rest are suspicious so the best advice I can give you Goudy is to get rid of all your loaded dice and all of them marked cards, and your tables with the secret drawers, and all those tricks of the trade and you better be do it quick! for a moment Doctor Daily sat stunned by jones revelations he had never even imagined that Goudy was not on the square and that he had been the victim of a cheat Doctor Daily sprang suddenly to his feet He grabed the papers from the table and threw them down on the flour He jerked the picture from the walls overturned chairs and stands and then He began to groan like some one in great pain V'I've come Back to get even with you Goudy you old raskel you beat me out of all my money and he threw and ink stand thou the window just must Goudy's head "Well for heavens sake!" exclaimed Goudy Jones what is that any way It's Doctor Daily's ghost! said jones "I heard two men talking aboutit in a store a few minuts ago it's doctor Daily ghost for sure—" thay all staredaghast just then the telephone rang and a voice which they all recognised as the Doctors "Hello central 102 plese. Hello, is this you Gray come up to the Black-Raven right away! and tell Bob And Tuffy Smith to come too what for you say Gray uh Goudy would like to see you men he called up a bunch of the men that Goudy Had cheated out of 'hear money Goudy tried to leave the room but unseen hand pushed him back, and unseen lips uttered a sharp command Sit down Goudy you cant get a way from me for I'm Doctor Day ily ghost

The Second Installment of This Charming Story Will Be Published in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES.

Prehistoric Discoveries in America

THE nearest thing to evidence of a really remote ancestor on this continent is the Nebraska tooth, which is supposed to have belonged to an anthropoid ape that lived in Nebraska 1,500,000 years ago.

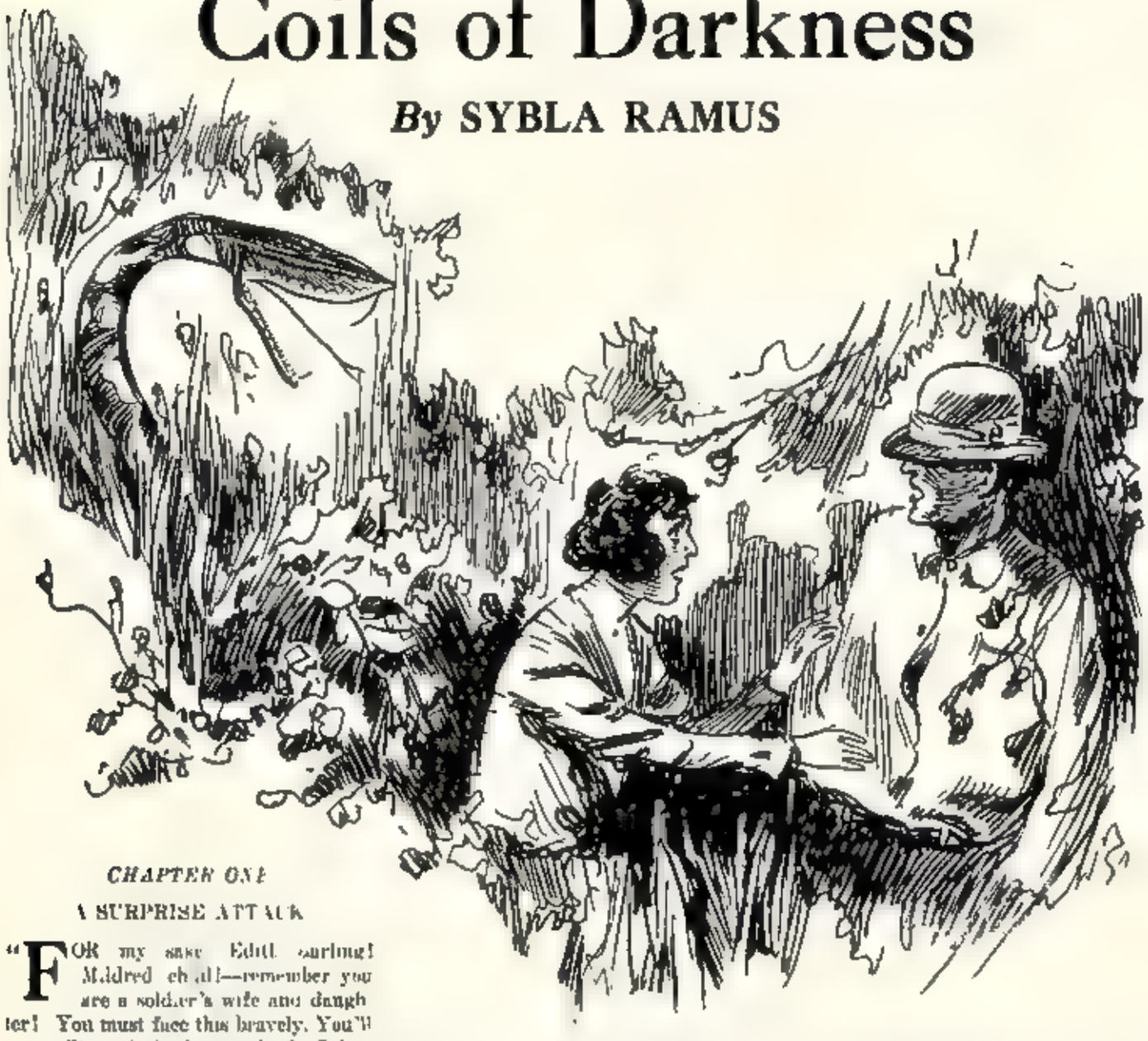
Then we have the Trenton man of New Jersey, who is not considered to date back any farther than the last glacial epoch. Last winter we heard of the discovery in Patagonia of a man's skull from the tertiary period. That would have been the most ancient human relic ever found, and would have upset the science of paleontology and all previous conceptions as to the comparative recentness of human life in the two Americas. However, the authenticity of that skull was disputed and the "discovery" petered out.

The origin of the American red race, including those nations which created marvelous civilizations in Central and South America, is a conundrum of science. Savants disagree in their guesses. Some are boosters for the Bering strait approach, others talk darkly of a marine migration across the Pacific from Malayan stock, others insist on the separate classification of the red man from the brown man. There is a tradition that North and South America were peopled by Atlantean refugees from the long series of convulsions in which the "lost continent" of Atlantis is supposed to have been submerged.

The First Installment of a New Serial That Contains an Unusual Thrill

Coils of Darkness

By SYBLA RAMUS



CHAPTER ONE

A SURPRISE ATTACK

"FOR my sake, Edith darling! Mildred child—remember you are a soldier's wife and daughter! You must face this bravely. You'll see we'll send the brown devils flying. There!—I must be off. Give me another kiss—and a smile, too! That's right!—

Colonel Rathbone drew his wife and daughter into a crushing embrace as he kissed them with that solemn intensity a man feels when he bids his dearest ones a farewell that may be the last.

The Colonel's command were tumbling out of their quarters, some still stupid with sleep, scrambling into their clothes and rushing to saddle their horses in answer to the call to action.

The natives were out and moving swiftly upon them. The alarm had just come in, brought by a naked, bleeding runner. Half killed, he had come through secret paths of the jungle running the terrible tiger and cobra gauntlet over a short cut which brought him to the British garrison a little in advance of the native horde. He gasped out his tale before falling senseless at the sentry's feet.

The Colonel leaped to action with a cold fear behind his alert, calm grip on the situation. He knew well the fearsome tribe they were going to meet, four times the number of his command. Yet his concise orders seemed to ring out almost jovially, inspiring every man with confidence and longing to be in the thick of it.

"We'll teach the bally devils a lesson this time!" he shouted.

Colonel Rathbone had snatched but an instant to take leave of his wife and daughter. Just aroused from sleep, pale and trembling, they clung desperately to him for a moment. He could not deceive them, however brave his front. They, too, knew the enemy, and they felt the undercurrent of his dread as he tore himself away.

"Harold, my husband!" —"Papa, Papa!" they sobbed as they ran out on the veranda.

He cleared the short flight of steps at two bounds, mounted his horse, and galloped away across the parade ground to the head of his little column of men. Scarcely waiting his word of command, they spurred after him to the road white in the Indian moonlight, and swept out of sight like a storm cloud, the thundering hoofs sounding long after the shadowy forms had vanished.

At full gallop they rode. They knew they must reach and pass the friendly native town before the wild hillmen descended upon it. A short space out, on the farther side of the little Indian village, ran a deep gully, difficult to pass, just before a narrow bit of road. Here the Colonel hoped to make a stand. At any rate, the suspense would soon be over. But before they had reached the last bend of the road, they heard shooting, yelling, women's screams, horrible noises and crashing of places being battered down—even wails of little children. All these told their story.

"Mass together, Boys! We'll have to rush them!"

The Colonel's voice rang out like a trumpet call.

But the odds were too heavy. The tide soon turned the wrong way. The British fought like tigers, while being forced back little by little, paying in blood for every foot of ground they struggled to hold. Worse still, the enemy had contrived to surround them on three sides. In another few minutes they would be trapped and massacred to the last man.

And then came the sound of horses galloping far away, but coming nearer fast! And then an English bugle, the stirring notes sending ten men's strength into every arm!

"Rush them again, boys! They're ours now!"

Led by their Colonel, they responded with such a dash that, as Corporal Hathaway afterwards said:

"Not all the devils in Hell couldn't 'a stood against it!"

The natives around them faltered, then gave back. Rathbone's men pressed them desperately. The galloping hoofs came nearer and nearer. The bugle notes rang louder, until, as a company of His Majesty's soldiers poured down from the town side of the road, the British defenders raised a great shout, and, together, scattered the fierce native horde like dust before them.

How they scattered!—the British close after them. But there was some difference in weight and horseflesh between pursuers and pursued. On their wiry little animals, inured to Indian roads, the natives soon put enough distance between themselves and the British to place many a dark hide in safety that night.

Straight back along the road to the compound the natives fled, somewhat to Colonel Rathbone's dismay, but, he reasoned:

"The dogs wouldn't have time to do any mischief, with us close on their heels."

Like a shadow of hell, they flitted past the Camp. Rathbone and some of his men, and the new arrivals, continued the pursuit for a time, harrying the enemy with rifle shots. Presently they turned hillward, there to follow byways inaccessible for cavalry mounts. At any rate, the dark men soon seemed to have dissolved into the atmosphere, or the earth to have swallowed them. No vestige remained of sight or sound to guide the British, who then abandoned the useless chase and turned homeward.

Colonel Rathbone and the leader of the rescue party rode side by side.

"A close call, that, Halketh! How in the name of Heaven did you drop from the clouds just at the right moment? I did not expect you for another month, anyway, according to my advices from Headquarters."

Halketh laughed joyously.

"Just a lucky fluke. I was told to bring my men over by the next boat, but by some slip my orders were misdated, and we were sent out on the 'Rangoon.' When we were marching inland we heard hints of trouble among the natives. I saw signs of unrest here and there, and thought it best to get on to you, especially as I knew you were short-handed. And we got here just in time—thank God!"

Colonel Rathbone grasped the young officer's hand.

"Thanks to God, and to you, Halketh, that we are here now riding home—instead of going to quarters up yonder—or elsewhere, as the case might be. I owe you something on this I shan't forget!"

"The debt is all mine, my dear Colonel, I assure you. That was a jolly run we gave the beggars! Are those your lights in the distance? They're ready to give us a welcome, I see."

Rathbone glanced sharply at the lights. A vague uneasiness seemed to express itself in the many rapidly moving gleams flitting here and there like Will-o'-the-Wisps.

"Yes—a welcome—I suppose that's it—but they seem to be looking for something." He pushed on a little faster. "I don't like it, Halketh. It's unusual, and looks like trouble. We'd better hurry. Full gallop!"

The whole troop dashed forward at top speed and soon reached the Camp. Soldiers and the few women there were scattered about and talking excitedly. Rathbone sprang from his horse in front of his quarters, almost colliding with his wife's English maid.

"What's the matter, Agnes? Where is your mistress?" he demanded sharply.

Agnes clasped her hands as if in grief or fear.

"Oh, sir! My poor young mistress!"—was all she could say.

The Colonel clutched her shoulder, shaking her involuntarily in the shock of terror which ran over him.

"What has happened? Where are they? Speak, girl!" he shouted.

Agnes wept hysterically.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!"—she sobbed—"She's gone!—lost—No one can find her. We don't know—we think those men took her as they ran by!"

For a few moments the Colonel stood as if paralyzed. A soldier approached and saluted. He was one of the guard left at the Post.

"Sir! Miss Mildred is missing. She was seen to leave the veranda just before the natives rode past here." He spoke quickly and with agitation. "Her ladyship thinks she may have gone to look down the road. Just about then the natives went by, and you a little behind them. We didn't miss her for some little time in the excitement. But now—we've searched everywhere, sir—"

The man stopped abruptly, catching his breath. The Colonel's lovely young daughter was a general favorite. At this moment Lady Rathbone ran to her husband and was gathered into his embrace.

"Harold! Our child! Mildred! Oh, my God!"

The Colonel soothed her gently as he led her into the house.

"We will find her, Edith. Come, dear!"

The tortured father tore himself from his distracted wife and tried to clear his brain sufficiently to give the necessary orders. He quickly organized several searching parties, placing Halketh's men with his own, who knew the ground. In a few minutes all was ready, and once more on that eventful night Rathbone and his men left the Post, but this time in the opposite direction.

Long after the wonderful dawn of an Indian day had broken, the weary search was still in progress. Not a trace had the seekers found, and the agonized father began to feel his endurance giving way. His own party was far in the hills now, and he began to believe that only loss of precious time would result by continuing in that direction. In bitter depression he gave the order to retrace their steps, intending to reach a

certain cross path, whence he would try another direction leading to the jungle.

The dreary way was retraveled and the branch road reached. Here they paused, while the Colonel consulted Corporal Hathaway, whose long service in India had trained him in jungle craft. While they were talking, Hathaway suddenly raised his hand to his ear and listened!

Faint, distant shouts! Rathbone and his Corporal stared at each other in tense, expectant silence and waited.

CHAPTER TWO

MILDRED

NOW again, and much nearer, by the very road they had been considering for their next adventure—shouts once more! No doubt about it this time—shouts of success!

Rathbone's party spurred to meet them, hope rising in the father's heart at last. A turn of the road showed the distant band coming on full swing. The leader held a woman in his arms, her white garments fluttering in the breeze.

A yell of joy went up from both groups. The Colonel galloped frantically forward, to see his daughter safe in Halketh's arms. Flinging himself from his horse, tears blinding him, he took his child from Halketh and pressed kisses on her quiet face. Halketh, deeply moved, stood close beside the Colonel, who quickly recovered his soldierly calm. With a grasp of the hand not soon to be forgotten, he said in a deep tone:

"Another debt, Halketh! I'll not try to tell you—"

He broke off suddenly. Something he had hardly noticed in the first great relief now came to him suddenly and ominously.

"Why — what's this? She has fainted!—eh, Halketh?"

Mildred lay quite still, supported between himself and Halketh. Halketh replied slowly, his voice expressing anxiety

"I really do not know what to say, sir. She doesn't seem to have any injury, beyond a slight scratch on one hand. She was like this when we found her, a short time back, and she has been so ever since. We think she may have been stunned; or perhaps the fright—" He broke off

"My child!—my child!"—murmured the Colonel, relieved from one ghastly fear only to be seized with another.

"How—where—in what way was she when you found her?" he asked, as he knelt on the ground and rested her head against his knee, gazing at her with intense anxiety.

"She was lying quietly on a bit of grassy space in the jungle, not very far in. We could see her white gown before we reached her. She seemed asleep, lying easily as if resting there. We could see no sign of injury except this little scratch or cut on her right hand—here."

Halketh tenderly raised the lovely hand.

"I think, sir," he went on, "it might be well to have a doctor see her as soon as possible."

Rathbone started up at once.

"You are right! Let us get her home as fast as we can."

He mounted his horse, and Halketh and Hathaway raised the unconscious girl into his arms, where he held her lovingly until he placed her in her mother's.

The Post Surgeon was nonplussed, when, after more than two hours effort, he was unable to rouse the girl from her coma. He gave it as his opinion that the fright she had endured when seized by the flying natives—which must have been so as she had been found so far from the Post—had rendered her unconscious, even throwing her, it might be, into a cataleptic state. It was also probable, he thought, that the natives, finding that she could not be roused, and being in rout and panic themselves and hampered by her dead weight, had left her where she was later found. The surgeon stated positively, after a careful physical examination, that the girl was uninjured, except for the slight wound on the right hand, which was too insignificant to be considered. He ordered absolute rest and quiet, and believed that she would awaken naturally from her strange and profound sleep.

This was indeed the case. On the following day signs of animation appeared, and presently she seemed as one awaking from deep sleep, to the unspeakable relief of her parents.

Relief, however, changed into dismay when the beautiful dark eyes rested on each in turn with no light of recognition in them. A few dreamy words fell from her lips, but apparently neither memory nor consciousness of surroundings stirred in the dazed brain.

This clouded condition lasted for more than a week. Then Mildred began to gain gradually in energy, with gleams of memory at times of certain persons or objects, and even a little of her oldtime interest in life.

Lord Halketh called each day. An irresistible appeal had drawn him to Mildred ever since the moment he first looked in her face, as she lay unconscious in the jungle. Here was an unusual type of beauty for an English girl. More like a lovely Oriental was Mildred Rathbone than a daughter of Anglo-Saxon stock. Since her mysterious illness a peculiarly wistful air surrounded her. She seemed like a child who had lost its way, trying to find where it belonged.

Day by day her spell grew on Halketh until he knew that he loved her desperately. For him, life suddenly resolved itself into the one great fact, that only Mildred made it worth living. Without her, there would be no reason for exist-

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Not because he came from an old and great family, whose wealth equaled its lineage, nor because he stood next in succession to a great peerage, was he a man of note at twenty-four. Achievements of his had already made his name known in the intellectual world. In particular he was noted for original scientific work and writing as applied to modern militarism. His ambitions were high. He believed that militarism should be made to serve the highest civil good, and he hoped to demonstrate this to the world.

Halketh was not only a scientist; he was also a born soldier. Upon his request he had been given his present Indian detail, where he felt he could work out some of his theories for the humanizing of militarism, as he put it. Conditions in India seemed to offer an ideal field, and his plans were mapped out.

And now, just as the moment was come, Fate suddenly sent across the path of this young soldier-scientist—a mere girl!

So Captain Halketh literally lived in the daily visit to his Colonel's quarters. It was all that meant life to him. Each afternoon he called, each afternoon he saw Mildred, in all her sweet half-unconsciousness. Little mattered military tactics of their best application now. These had gone into abeyance until they should come into renewed, enhanced life in the Sun of Mildred's "Yes."

As the days passed it was certain that she was slowly returning to something of her former attitude toward life; a returning toward self, though still blurred and imperfect, dreamy and listless. Gradually remembrance of parents and events appeared once more, and apparently to remain. With this came another fact, so it seemed, and as Halketh dared to hope. Such personal interest as Mildred showed at all seemed to center almost entirely in himself, although evidenced as yet only in the dreamy and

impersonal way in which she accepted all things as they came back to her. Perceptibly his visits aroused her. She apparently enjoyed his tales of unusual adventures.

Lady Rathbone was overjoyed. She encouraged Lord Halketh's visits, and perhaps, after the way of many another mother, she even indulged a bit in visions; visions not only of her daughter's complete recovery, but, later on—who knows? .

Meantime Halketh joyously saw the pretty air of dreamy interest Mildred seemed to keep for him alone—if he were not mistaken in the daring hopes her manner allowed him to build upon. Yet there was the ever-present fear hanging over him that recovery might change the girl's mental state with the physical.

With a lover's keener insight Halketh noticed that her interest invariably roused to tales concerning hunting, or dealing with any kind of animal life. Happening one day to see a particularly engaging puppy offered for sale by a native, on the instant came an inspiration, and he bought the tiny creature and presented it the same day to Mildred. It was one of those fluffy, wriggly miniature canines that children generally love so dearly

The effect on Mildred was almost startling. She seemed for the first time really to awaken to life. Seizing the puppy, she covered him with kisses, almost as if she would devour him in her intense enthusiasm. Then she threw herself on the floor, where the delighted puppy gamboled about, responding joyously to his new owner's caresses.

"Mama, Mama! Come!—see what I have! Oh, if I could only tell you how happy I am!"

Lady Rathbone shed tears of delight This was the first time since her abduction that Mildred had evinced real interest in anything.

Halketh, too, threw himself on the floor beside the happy girl, joining in her play and encouraging the dog's pranks, until Mildred turned to him with shining eyes.

"You have brought me happiness! How can I ever thank you for what you have done for me!"

She dropped into a chair, with the tiny dog clasped tightly to her breast. Halketh bent over her

"If you really like this little thing so much, how would you like to go out where you could see many more like him? I would take you—"

"I would love it!" cried the girl. "That is what I need. Oh, how long it is since I have been away from life, since—since—" She faltered then and broke off

"Since what, my darling? What is it that you have wanted? Tell mother?" Lady Rathbone said coaxingly, happier than she had been since the terrible day of Mildred's lapse from life.

Mildred sat quite still, and her vivid animation seemed to die down. She let the dog slip from her lap. The dreamy look came into her eyes again. She passed a hand wearily over her forehead. then murmured:

"I don't know—there is something—I wish for it so much!"

She closed her eyes for a moment. Suddenly they opened, turning full on Halketh with a bright, questioning look. Involuntarily he took her hand.

"You could find it—you brought me this—you could find it—"

She leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes again, and soon they saw that she was fast asleep. Halketh and Lady Rathbone looked from Mildred to each other, wondering. Then he, at the mother's request, raised the girl in his arms and carried her across the room to a couch, without awakening her

"Ernest," said Lady Rathbone, "I am sure Mildred is on her way to recovery. You seem to have hit upon the very thing to rouse her. How can we follow it up until we have the dear girl safe? What do you advise?"

Halketh considered before replying.

"I believe this may really be a starting point. It is very evident that she loves pets."

"She never cared much for them before. But perhaps I had not noticed."

"She is in a most peculiar condition, we must remember," went on Halketh slowly. "But the main thing seems to be that she can now be interested by pets—living things. I wonder how it would be to take her driving? We could go through the market place where the natives are always selling dogs and cats and monkeys, and birds and even snakes, for that matter."

"Splendid!" said Lady Rathbone. "In that way we can get her to go out, which has been impossible, so far. Suppose we try it tomorrow morning?"

"By all means," he agreed. "I will call for you early, and we will buy out the market place of live stock, if she fancies them as she did this little fellow." And Halketh actually hugged the puppy in his joy.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE JUNGLE

"SHE certainly seems brighter than at any time since that awful night," said Lady Rathbone, when Halketh came next morning with the carriage. "She slept all night without waking. We did not even undress her."

As she finished speaking, the girl herself entered the room, carrying the puppy

"See how he loves me already," she said gaily. "Isn't he a darling!" She cuddled the dog, who wriggled his delight in her arms. "I couldn't be without him, now I have him!" She rubbed her cheek in the silky coat, while her mother and Halketh exchanged glances. As they got into the carriage Lady Rathbone found an opportunity to whisper:

"She is almost herself—if it wasn't for that queer new fancy for animals!"

And so it seemed as they drove along, for Mildred chatted gaily, though intermittently, holding the puppy close and caressing him often.

It chanced that morning that there were but few sellers of birds or animals in the market place, but their wares excited the same enthusiasm in Mildred as had the puppy.

"Oh, the darlings," she cried, springing to her feet in the open carriage as, at Halketh's signal, a dark-faced native offered two little dogs, one a dachshund, for their inspection.

"Let me hold him!" Mildred was in rapture with the dachshund especially, reaching out for the animal as she spoke.

"And that one—and those sweet kittens! I must have them all!"

The kitten vender hurried forward. Mildred fell back in her seat, to catch the three little felines together in her lap. There she tossed them to her heart's content, while the dachshund and his companion and the original puppy all pulled at her skirts.

Halketh promptly bought the lot, also some half dozen birds of various kinds, these being all that the market afforded at the moment.

"I'm so glad!—so glad I came! What a heavenly idea, Ernest, to bring me here today!" Mildred's joy seemed so abnormal that Halketh began to fear the effects of the over-excitement. However, anything which could rouse her from her apathy must be a start in the right direction. But he felt it wiser to take her home now, before her enthusiasm might reach too high a point.

By this time Mildred was in ecstasies. She seemed excited to an almost painful

degree. Her whole body trembled, and when the dachshund playfully bit at her finger she screamed with joy

"Oh, Mama! I must have them *all* in my room with me! They must never leave me—*never*! Oh, I am so happy!"

She sank back as if exhausted with sheer delight. After a little she turned to Halketh, with a smile which transported him, and murmured:

"I owe it all to you! Tell me—will you always do this for me?"

Halketh's answer was eminently satisfactory. He also seized the occasion to arrange for another excursion of the same sort for the following day.

As they left the carriage, Mildred threw her arms around the neck of one of the horses. She caressed the animal and continued to fondle him until Halketh had another inspiration.

"Why not ride tomorrow, instead of driving?" he asked.

Mildred agreed with delight. She seemed physically strong enough now and, like many English girls, was a splendid horsewoman. Accordingly, the ride was fixed for the following day.

She retained her animation of the morning for almost the entire day. Her recovery was apparently progressing steadily; there could hardly be any doubt about it. She busied herself enthusiastically with her new pets and would scarcely leave them for an instant.

Her mother's joy was great, and her gratitude to Halketh without limit.

"You have been our savior from the first moment you came to us, Ernest," she said with deep emotion. "What do we not owe to you? You saved us from the natives, you found our Mildred, and now you are finding a cure for her! How can we ever repay you?"

"Dear Lady! It is not you who owe me, but I who owe you," answered Halketh impulsively. His feelings swept him away, and he rushed on tempestuously, pouring his love and hopes into Lady Rathbone's willing ear.

"My dear boy! You have my full consent and my blessing," she said, a great gratitude filling her heart. "I believe the child already loves you, for you are the only being who can interest her now, in any way. Even if I am mistaken about her loving you, I am sure she soon will. I may tell you I am very happy over this, for no one could be more welcome to me than you, Ernest."

Halketh took her hand and kissed it.

"I shall speak to the Colonel today," he said.

"He loves you like a son already," she replied warmly.

The following day was rainy and impossible for the ride. The weather for several days thereafter being equally unfavorable, it was not until the fifth day that the plan was carried out.

Meantime, Mildred had continued in the brighter mood caused by her new pets. She seemed so happy with Halketh, so grateful to him for her present happiness, that he felt almost sure of her, although he realized that until she was again in her normal condition he could not ask her the momentous question.

After the first joy of her improvement, however, he became conscious of a vague sensation of uneasiness—a slight distaste even, over the manner of this same improvement. At first this disturbing feeling crept into the back of his mind at odd moments only. But as the days passed he could not repress a growing repugnance for the unnatural joy Mildred exhibited when in contact with the creatures he himself had bought for her. She gloated over them. He had a disagreeable impression that she would even like to eat them, if such a thing were possible. It seemed that she could not remain two minutes together without fondling and kissing the pets of her collection, all of which were by this time badly spoiled.

Of course, anything that could arouse her from that awful apathy must be welcomed. Still, he trusted that with time she would grow less extreme in her fondness for animals. He thought lately that she seemed to seek vaguely for some missing thing. He noticed at times a certain incipient dissatisfaction even with her pets. Her mother, too, noticed this.

"My child, do you wish anything?" she asked.

"Yes, Mama—oh yes!—I want it so much!"

"What do you want, then, darling? Only tell me, and you shall have it."

Mildred looked suddenly bewildered. She dropped the kitten she was fondling and came to her mother's side.

"What would you like, my love? What is it?" asked the mother again.

Mildred looked at her for some time, then said softly, but more as if to herself:

"I—really don't know—"

Halketh came over to her and took her hand without speaking. The girl turned to him and said with a strange smile:

"You could get it for me, Ernest." She remained beside him, her hand in his.

"Then you shall have it—can you tell me what it is, Dear?"

Mildred made no reply. She disengaged her hand slowly, and turned back absent-mindedly to her pets.

Lady Rathbone and Halketh exchanged puzzled glances. Tacitly they agreed not to continue the subject then. But often afterwards they noticed that the girl seemed vaguely seeking, but ever without finding what she sought.

On the morning of the ride the horses were brought around in the best of condition. This, and the bright sun, which now appeared after several days absence, pleased Mildred greatly. She showed her delight first by fondling the horse, a beautiful animal and Mildred's favorite. Once in the saddle, her joy was boundless. Scarcely glancing at Halketh, she put her horse to a swift gallop, taking the road which led to the jungle—the same over which she had been carried on the night of her abduction.

Halketh tried to overtake her. He had not intended to follow this road, thinking it unwise to chance arousing memories of her dreadful experience. But Mildred's horse was considerably faster than his own. There was also some difference in their weights, and Mildred had somewhat the start. They were almost at the edge of the jungle before he caught up, and then only because her animal had less endurance than his own and had slackened his pace, owing to the rougher ground they were now on.

Mildred's face was shining as he had never seen it, and her eyes burned brightly.

"See it!—See it!" she cried out as he approached, pointing toward the jungle. "There happiness is waiting for me!" Her words ended almost in a scream. She struck her horse violently with the whip, and he responded instantly and sprang forward.

But by this time Halketh was beside her. With a strong hand he seized her bridle, forcing the excited horse to slow down to the pace of his own. He was very seriously alarmed now at the wildness of Mildred's words and manner. He tried to sooth her while holding firmly to her bridle.

"Mildred, dear! Calm yourself! No wonder this place frightens you. Come—let us turn back—"

"Turn back! *Never!*"

She shrieked the words, and at the same time violently applied the spur. With a sudden bolt her horse freed himself from Halketh's momentarily relaxed grasp, plunged wildly, and dashed straight into the jungle. Through the dense undergrowth and overhanging branches the maddened animal tore his way as Mildred's frantic spurring drove him on and on.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KING COBRA

HALKETH'S larger and less agile mount could not follow quickly enough. Recognizing this, he leaped to the ground and flung the bridle over a branch. Then, on foot, he plunged after Mildred, taking advantage of the way already broken for him by her horse.

But even so his progress was difficult. Mildred gained on him, as he could tell by the fainter and fainter crashing sounds as she pushed madly on. The jungle was too dense for rapid traveling, however, even with the wildest of riding. Halketh managed to keep within earshot, and presently he knew by the sounds ahead that his distance from them was lessening.

Suddenly the sounds ceased. Halketh paused a moment to listen in the perfect silence, then plunged ahead again, guided only by the torn and broken foliage left by Mildred's horse. In places where the vegetation was soft and yielding he would lose the trail and be forced to beat about until he picked it up again. For some time no sounds reached him. His anguished calls brought no answer, although it seemed impossible that the girl could be very far away.

Then—quite near him through the thicket—came Mildred's sweet voice—but not addressed to him! Soft words they were; little coos and gurgling sounds of endearment, such as one uses to a child. Halketh shivered.

"Mildred!" he shouted—but only the same sweet sounds flowed unbrokenly on.

It was gruesome—uncanny—horrible! A chill crept over Halketh. He felt a cold, overmastering terror, as of some unseen, appalling Presence! What was he about to see?

He tore at the tough branches and wiry twigs, woven cloth-like between the trees. They obstructed him at every turn. In his terrible excitement it seemed to him that he made no progress at all.

And all the while the sweet voice ran on, now bubbling with happy laughter, now falling deeper into intense sounds of love. The horror of it grew on Halketh as he heard, working frantically to get through the almost unyielding tangle. What could it mean if not sudden madness? Yet even this, dreadful though the thought, seemed less awful than a sinister something else!—a something unnatural and ghastly which he could not fathom and shrank from knowing.

He worked on more wildly. Like a madman now he tore at the barrier of branches and wild vines. The uncanny feeling clutched him as with cold hands until his brain reeled and he felt he could not endure it longer.

Suddenly he felt a hard object in his pocket. A knife he had forgotten was there! In a frenzy of renewed strength he hacked at the wire-like net work. It yielded now, little by little. Only a yard or two more—

It gave way at last. He plunged through, though fearing to lift his eyes to what was there! And—just a little further on—there she stood! Mildred! Smiling, safe, and well—apparently The sweetest sight in the world, with nothing at all to justify his sensation of clammy horror!

Nothing there to cause alarm or dread—only Mildred herself. She stood, half turned from him, leaning slightly forward, parting the dense jungle foliage as if to penetrate further in.

"Wait—wait!" she called in cooing tones.

Halketh, in the wave of thankfulness sweeping him away, vaguely heard a rustling which seemed to come from far within the green and brown depths of the undergrowth surrounding the tiny clearing they were standing in. With a bound, he sprang across the little space and caught her in his arms.

"Mildred! Mildred! My darling!"

He was quite unstrung, in the relief of the tension he had just been suffering in his strange fear He held the girl tightly clasped to him, scarcely knowing what he did. She turned a radiant face to him, but—with unseeing eyes, so far as he was concerned! Some other, more powerful interest drew her, and she began to struggle in his arms. He looked about, seeking for the cause. Then he thought he understood.

"Your horse! Where is he? How—what—"

But still she struggled—still seemed unaware of his existence except as an obstructing object.

"Don't fear, dearest!" he said soothingly. "Do not try to follow him—Nero can carry us both,"—and, with the feeling of unknown danger again pressing upon him, he lifted the girl bodily, and turned to find the way back as he had come. But Mildred now fought desperately.

"Do not take me away from here!"

Her voice, shrill and strange, trembled with eagerness—eagerness and fury mixed. Halketh, holding her more tightly than he realized in his excitement, felt again that weird thrill, as if the uncanny thing of evil were very near now. He looked into the beautiful face—more glowing, more alive than he had ever seen it. But he shuddered at the expression in her eyes when they met his own: baffled longing, rage, even malevolence and hatred—directed at himself!

"You are killing me! Do you want to take my one chance of existence from me?" She wailed the words, tearing at him with wild, groping hands.

Shocked and terrified, Halketh believed that her strange malady had taken a new turn. He vainly tried to calm the struggling girl, while trying to carry her out of the clearing and into the difficult path he had torn and cut through when he followed her.

Strange sounds seemed to run through the jungle. Weird cries of birds or animals, he could not tell which. And all about them he felt that sinister sensation of an evil, haunting Presence, not to be shaken off.

Again the rustling sound—this time coming closer. As it neared them, Mildred's struggles grew more frantic and her shrieks wilder and more piercing, as she fought against the arms gripping her.

"It's nothing, darling!" he said desperately. "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. We shall soon be safe." He redoubled his efforts to put distance between them and this haunted, eerie spot.

Mildred's struggles ceased suddenly. Finding herself helpless in Halketh's powerful grasp, her head fell on his shoulder, while muffled, convulsive sobs shook her.

So much of the tangled growth had fallen back into place that, although Halketh had opened a path as he came, it almost seemed as if he must fight it all over again going back—and this with Mildred in his arms.

The rustling, too, gained on them. It seemed to be following them. Halketh was sure of that now, and to his overstrained senses it seemed to come sometimes from along the ground, and then from above, as though making its way through the tree tops.

But Halketh had now won through the worst of the underbrush, and the creature pursuing them—if creature it were—seemed to have desisted, for the rustling was no longer audible. The brush was thinner now. If he could only get out of this cursed tangle without further mishap, they would soon be safe.

The rustling again! This time very close, and a little to one side of them, its progress parallel with theirs! Only a large, heavy body could so disturb the foliage. The strange, weird tales of

dread creatures of the jungle had been running in his thoughts.

Could he succeed in reaching Nero in time? The powerful horse could carry double, but— Fear, a cold, blind, blighting fear Halketh had never known before, seized him as with clammy fingers.

The brush grew still thinner. One more good pull—the going was almost easy now—Yes! they were through, thank Heaven!

And so was *something else!* Again that rustling, this time close behind. God!—what could that be?—that sinuous, waving Thing—just emerging from the jungle tangle! There!—where the fringe of foliage grew thin!

Motionless with horror, Halketh stood gazing at the Thing protruding from the bushes—the Terror which had companioned him, unseen, as he battled through the path of dread, now at last revealed.

A Head, from time immemorial the type of all Evil, slowly waved from side to side, gradually advancing as the writhing body followed, emerging at last into full sight of the petrified beholder. Coiling, twisting, gigantic, a monster serpent posed itself between the branches of some tall trees which straggled amongst the undergrowth.

A horrible paralysis held Halketh fast. It seemed to him years that he remained fixed, returning the stare of the glittering terrible eyes which slowly came nearer and nearer. He knew that he was doomed unless the spell were soon broken. He realized that his will power was being dominated and his consciousness sinking fast under the hypnotic current flowing from the unwinking eyes holding his own. And he had laughed at tales of snakes and their gaze which charmed! The crowning horror of the sudden appearance of this ghastly Master of the whole demons' revel had gripped *him!* As one in a nightmare, he struggled to break the spell. As in a nightmare, his struggles were in vain. He felt himself relaxing—the Head was almost upon him; in another moment he would be lost. . . And then, as if from an infinite distance, came the sound of Nero's familiar neigh!

Halketh suddenly felt himself once more in touch with earth life, although still vaguely and with a feeling of immeasurable remoteness, as when waking life first stirs dimly, after a long, deep sleep.

Another struggle, and the spell broke as suddenly as it came. Panting and gasping, Halketh tore his eyes from those other appalling ones, now so near. The giant cobra struck in the same instant that Halketh, with a tremendous backward spring, avoided the fatal thrust. Whirling around, he rushed for the tree where Nero stood secured, but plunging and rearing frantically at sight of the now enraged and hissing serpent just beyond.

Then, somehow—never afterward to be recalled—he and Mildred were on Nero's broad back and away. The horse was wild with fear, and, having rested in the shade, carried his double load easily at a swinging gallop.

Once more awake! Once more feeling the glorious power of his will in his own hands! Never again, thought Halketh in that blessed moment of release, would he scoff at strange tales.

One glance backward as they flew onward to safety—to see the giant snake pausing in his pursuit, and Halketh always positively declared this to be the fact—*smilingly* watch them out of sight!

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SNAKE CHARMER

AND now Mildred. For the first time since the weird and awful experience they had just escaped from, Halketh was able to bring his attention back fully to her. With amazement, he saw her sleeping quietly on his shoulder. Probably the result of the excitement and terror she had just passed through, thought Halketh.

But what was this delicate flush on her formerly pale face? He had never seen her look like this! Fresh, sweetly pink and white, asleep in his arms, she looked like a being restored to the perfection of health.

As she slept, the red lips curved in the most angelic of smiles, a passion of relief swept over Halketh, this time untroubled by the sinister aftermath of the horrible half-hour of fear and struggle just passed. All that faded from his outer consciousness—the danger, the whole weird effect of the situation, the extraordinary behavior of Mildred. He must have been bewildered with the excitement of it all! He must have fancied her hysterical actions, or exaggerated the very nature of the fright she suffered from and its effects! Was he not overwrought himself?

His beautiful Mildred! Sleeping angel! How unwise he had been to risk a ride so soon, in her still precarious state! He should have known it might arouse those memories of her terrible abduction, which most of all should have been avoided until her normal mental condition was firmly restored. This must have been the explanation of the strange and alarming impulse which caused that wild dash of hers. Of course in her peculiar state any untoward freak might be looked for. As for her violent treatment of himself—the feature he found most unwelcome for consideration—he tried to seek a plausible reason for it. Indeed, the remembrance of the expression in Mildred's eyes as she struggled to free herself brought with it a pang so keen that Halketh felt that he *must* find an explanation.

As he turned it over and over in his mind a sudden light seemed to break upon him. He had found a solution; yes, beyond a doubt, he had it! In his desperate efforts to get out of that terrible place he must have held the poor child so tightly as to cause her pain—almost to strangle her, perhaps, in his excitement. At the thought, such a rush of horror and remorse overcame Halketh that he drew her closer and kissed her passionately.

She opened her eyes. They looked into his.

"Mildred, Mildred! I love you—love you!" He kissed her lips and eyes, her face and neck. "Tell me you love me—my wife! Kiss me, if you love me!"

Her arms went round his neck. She raised her lips to his. The bridle drooped, and Nero slowed down to a walk. All else was forgotten.

"I love you, Ernest darling. . ."

They rode into camp to find the Colonel and his wife in the gravest anxiety at the return of Mildred's horse without his rider some half hour earlier. In his haste to tell her parents that his happiness was settled at last, Halketh forgot to mention some of the incidents of their adventure; such as Mildred's runaway being of her own pleasure, and, later, her strange reluctance to his protection.

Then, also, there was Mildred's sudden and apparently perfect restoration to her normal self. She had never been more blooming, more brilliant in wit and beauty both. The lovers lived in a fairy world of their own, while Lady Rathbone threw herself into preparations for a brilliant wedding, all her anxiety relieved, as it seemed, at one glorious, providential stroke. As time went on, Mildred's cure endured. Her health and spirits kept their splendid balance, with no hint of a return of the strange trouble which had gone as suddenly as it came.

Mildred's interest in her various pets waned so greatly after her engagement that her mother was obliged to give the collection into the care of the servants, as Mildred herself did not even take the trouble to feed them.

One morning, as they were riding over the hill road, the weird music of a snake charmer's pipe came toward them on the breeze. Halketh was not then familiar with it, and said:

"Listen, Mildred! What is that? How beautiful! It's like Lakme's air in the opera, isn't it?" The fantastic strains floating nearer and nearer had a strange, magical beauty for his sensitive ear.

Mildred pulled up sharply, listening intently. The sound approached them through a glade of trees, and fluttering white garments could be seen. Their wearer drew nearer. He carried a covered basket slung across his shoulder. Two or three small serpents coiled about his arms and neck as he sounded the uncanny notes of the Hindoo snake charm.

Before Halketh realized what she was about, Mildred slipped from her horse and rushed toward the Indian until she was close enough to reach the snakes swinging from his shoulders.

A little, pointed, hooded head stretched itself toward her. With a strange, gurgling cry of delight, she seized it in one hand, and with the other disengaged its coils from its master, and then in trembling haste wrapped the reptile about her own neck—the while murmuring caressingly, rubbing the head against her cheek.

Horror seized Halketh—horror like that which had gripped him that day when Mildred fled from him into the jungle. With terrible intensity now, that day and that event came back into his mind. Hardly knowing what he did, he sprang to her side and tried to tear the snake away from her.

"Mildred! Are you mad? Or do you want to make me so?"

She turned on him like a flash, striking him wildly, in an effort to prevent the snake's removal. Like a fury, her eyes glared into his. She battled madly to free herself and the snake from his grasp.

Her face! Great Heaven! Could this be Mildred, the sweet, gentle girl he loved?

The reptile, too, sought escape. It freed its head sufficiently to strike, and the little tongue shot out to Mildred's lips before Halketh could prevent!

The Second Installment of This Uncanny Novel Will Be Published in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES.

Odd Facts About Insanity

DODGING street cars, sidestepping automobiles and eating rich foods are modern contributors to an increasing percentage of insanity, according to Dr. A. G. Hyde, for ten years superintendent of Massillon State Hospital.

"Each year there is a larger number of patients admitted to the hospital," Dr. Hyde said. "We are 400 over normal capacity now, and more are being admitted daily. There is no doubt that the speed with which the world is living is responsible in part."

Infected teeth often cause insanity, he said, and bad teeth—due to eating rich foods—are more prevalent today than ever before. For that reason a dental clinic is maintained at the hospital. As soon as a patient is admitted his teeth are examined, and suspicious molars and bicuspids are extracted.

Tonsils are next examined. Bad tonsils cause insanity in many cases, Dr. Hyde said, and in all cases where the tonsils are found to be diseased they are removed.

"The study of insanity is a matter of elimination," he asserted. "We correct all physical ills so far as possible, and in a majority of cases an improved mental condition results. In fact, mental disease is now viewed in the same light as physical disease.

"Many more cases of mental trouble are being cured now than formerly. This is due to the fact such diseases are better understood and also that patients are sent to the hospitals in earlier stages of their trouble than was formerly the case.

"It is when mental troubles are treated in the stages of inception that cures can be wrought, although even advanced cases can be helped if treated vigorously."

More men go insane than women, but men are more easily cured, Dr. Hyde said. Women patients cause more trouble than male patients.

The proportion of male to female insane is now about three to two, he estimated.

"Fear or sudden shock may cause insanity, but unless there is something in the brain that is not just right the mind will not snap," Dr. Hyde said. "The same is true of disease. There are many diseases that cause insanity, but if the person is free from hereditary taint of insanity and has a strong, healthy mind in most cases the disease will not effect the mind.

"The rush of life in the larger cities is responsible for much of the insanity, and that is why when a city grows rapidly and people begin living faster we have more insane from that city."

Keeping the patients cheerful is one of the big things in treatment of the mentally diseased, he said, and for this reason plenty of wholesome entertainment is provided.

Contrary to general impression, Dr. Hyde declared that strait-jackets were not used.

"I have never seen a strait-jacket in use in an asylum in my life," he added. "Certainly we never use one here. We do not resort to solitary confinement either. When a patient becomes violent we give him a shower bath. That usually quiets him."

An Episode in a Madhouse

CARVED IN THE FLESH

By TOM RAWSON HILBOURN

SLOWLY, as though devoured by a fiery dragon, the sun disappeared behind the distant hills, painting the sky until it was as a shield that had caught the stain of blood from the dying orb. The white-washed walls of a cell in the State Asylum for the Criminal Insane were encrimsoned by reflected light.

"Blood!" shrieked a crouching figure from the corner of the cell. "Blood on white flesh!" and trembling hands covered his gleaming, staring eyes.

"You'd better look at Number 47, Bill," advised a corridor-keeper to a guard.

The guard nodded, walked slowly down the passage-way between the grated cells, his slippered feet soundless upon the concrete floors. The red glint of the setting sun invaded even the gloom of the dismal corridor

"He's always worse when he sees anything red," grumbled Bill. "He'll rave the rest of the night, I suppose."

From within the cell occupied by Number 47 came low moans, then a jumble of words—words uttered in a pleading, halting voice; a short silence, and the pitch of the voice rose to a shriek.

"Blood! Blood on white flesh! The blood of my name!" screamed the man who crouched in the farthest corner of the cell.

Bill Waterman, though he had been guard in the asylum for many years, shivered slightly. He peered into the cell, quite unseen by the cringing man within. Although Waterman had heard the ravings of the cell's inmate time after time, always would he pause, as if fascinated. Well did he know the story of the imprisoned man, but the tale's horror enchained him, held him there to listen to its repeating. He leaned against the wall out of sight of the man in the cell.

"I loved her. Oh, God, how I loved her!" the voice of Number 47 had sunk almost to a whisper. "And she loved me. She was mine—mine. I thrilled with the light of love that shone in her eyes when we were together I trembled when her beautiful, soft arms crept lovingly about me. I flamed when her lips sought mine.

"For years I had loved her, waiting for the wonderful day when she would kneel at my side before the priest. And when that day came, the happiness was even greater than I had dreamed. She was my sweetheart, my mistress, my wife, all three in one. She was my all.

"I was called away. My firm sent me far away into the swamps of South America. The parting was terrible, but we both knew that it meant my advancement, my chance to make the fortune for us that would enable me to provide her with all the luxuries that she craved and that I longed to place at her feet.

"Through fever-drenched swamps, battling the dangers of the jungles, fighting for life itself day after day, I made my way. I had before me always the picture of her when we parted—sob-shaken, trembling with grief. 'God speed you and bring you back to me,' she had prayed as I sailed away

"There is no mail in the rubber country. My party was far beyond the comforting blessings of messages from loved ones. Each day I wrote love-messages to her in my diary. I would show them to her upon my return. She would treasure the words that I had written during the lonely nights in the camps of the fever country

"Endless were the days before my work had finished. Delays piled upon delays. I burned with impatience to return to my loved one, but for her welfare I stuck to my post. I sent love-thoughts hurtling through space. I felt that they must reach her and tell her of my great love.

"Came the day of my departure for our home. Ours was a slow sailing, ancient craft that seemed to creep through the waves. Day followed day of ceaseless yearning for the woman I loved. I paced the deck, hour by hour, longing for the journey's ending.

"At last the ship slipped into dock. I hastened through the customs, burning with the desire to rush to my loved one. I cursed the slowness of the taxi that bore me homeward. Would it never arrive! Finally the machine drew up before my door. I leaped to the ground, flung a bill to the driver and fairly flew up the pathway.

"I noticed that the grounds seemed unkempt, the pathway was weed-grown. These were but fleeting impressions which flashed upon me as I leaped forward so that I might the sooner clasp my adored one to my pounding heart.

"It came to me suddenly. The house was deserted. What could have happened? Was she ill? Could she—? But no! it could not be that. She could not have been taken *from* me. God could not be so cruel. Frantically I rang the bell. No answer came. I peered in at the windows. The house was deserted.

"Then began my search. Friends at first sought to conceal the truth from me, but I forced it from them. My wife had proven faithless. Another had robbed me of my dearest prize. From the moment I learned the truth the world took on a crimson tinge. Always was there a red blur before my eyes.

"I sacrificed everything—my position—my worldly goods. I turned everything available into *money*—money that I carried always with me. I trailed the pair from place to place. They were always ahead of me, but my searching was as relentless as death itself.

"At last I found them. They had fled to a cabin in the western mountains. Unknown to them, I watched them—watched them and planned.

"I am a strong man—my hatred made me the stronger. I came upon him one day alone on a high peak in the mountains. I crept upon him slowly, cautiously. He did not hear my approach—and then I had him in my arms. He was as helpless as a child. In spite of his struggles, I bore him to the edge of a cliff and lowered him until his fingers clutched it. He could not draw himself to safety, and I laughed as I saw his fingers cling to the rock. They slipped—slipped. On his face was written agony, but there was also agony engraved upon my heart.

"As his hands loosened, I brought the heel of my shoe down upon his finger tips. I did not stamp, but pressed firm-

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ly and laughed at the pain I knew I was bringing to him. He had brought pain to my heart. He begged, pleaded, entreated, but I watched him smilingly—watched him until he fell with a shrieking curse flung from his lips. I watched him fall—fall and then crash upon the jagged rocks below.

"I had far to go before I could reach the cabin where he had left her. I knew she would be awaiting his return as she had once awaited mine. Night had fallen before I reached the cabin.

"A light gleamed from the tiny window of the log-built cabin. I saw this light gleaming through the openings among the massive trees long before I reached their love-nest. It was her beacon light, the light that would guide him to her. Did she long for his coming as I had thought she longed for mine in the days of my happiness?

"Approaching in silence, I crept close to the cabin wall. I peered through the window. She was there, nervously pacing back and forth across the tiny room. The light of the fire burning in the open fireplace painted her—painted her scarlet.

"Noiselessly, I opened the door, but she saw me almost as I entered the room. She did not scream, but her face grew white and she trembled and swayed as a slender tree sways before the rush of storm.

"My eyes drank in all her splendid beauty, but my heart did not quicken as it had in those days when I had possessed her. It beat with the slow, dull throb of the heart of a wounded beast. I was strangely calm.

"Her lips parted as though she would speak, but there was no sound issuing from them. I saw her tongue make the effort to moisten them, but they remained dry, pallid.

"Slowly I approached her. She shrank from me until she was backed against the wall of the cabin. I reached forth and grasped her arm. It was cold; I could feel the tremor of fear at my touch.

"'I have come,' was all that I said.

"'What—what are you going to do?' she faltered, shrinking from me.

"I did not answer. My other hand sought her free arm, and as I grasped it, I could feel her flesh quiver under my clasp. I drew her to me and looked at the stark naked fear in her eyes.

"There was a crude bunk builded in one corner of the cabin; an upright post ran from its corner from the floor to roof. Clasping both of her arms within the grip of one of my hands, I loosened my belt, forcing the fear-ridden woman slowly toward the bunk. I bound her with the leathern belt tightly to the post.

"When she was securely bound, I reached forth and pulled the clothing from her quivering body. Deliberately, ruthlessly, I stripped every vestige of covering from her. She stood before me, her glistening white flesh shrinking from my touch. I could hear the rattle in her throat as she made an effort to cry out.

"I had planned all that I would do. My hand sought the sheath-knife that I wore in my belt. Slowly I drew it from its sheath. I tested its point with my finger. The steel felt cool beneath my touch.

"Again my eyes sought those of the woman standing helplessly before me. She flinched under my glance and then there broke from her lips a torrent of prayers—of entreaties—and finally she was silent. She had fainted.

"I set to work rapidly. There upon her tender flesh I began carefully to carve my name. She was mine, and upon her I would place my mark of ownership. None other could have her without the knowledge that she belonged to another man.

"As my knife bit into her flesh, she recovered from her swoon, but under the sting of pain she again collapsed. During her conscious moment, I told her of what I intended to do.

"Carefully, slowly, taking all pains that my knife did not bite too deeply, I carved my name upon the fair flesh beneath her firm, rounded breasts. The crimson blood flowed steadily downward making branching paths upon the white skin.

"JACKSON KERREY
HIS WOMAN

"These are the words I left engraved with all my skill upon the woman to whom I had given my name and who could never belong to another. Blood! Blood on white flesh! The blood of my name!" screamed Number 47, crouching shiveringly in the corner of his cell.

"Poor devil," muttered Bill Waterman. "We'll have to put a colored glass in the window. He's always worse when he sees red."

Orientalist Studies Egyptian Coffins

PROF. JAMES HENRY BREASTED of the University of Chicago, renowned Orientalist, is sailing to visit again the tomb of King Tutankhamen. He will join Howard Carter, who is already in the Valley of the Kings as head of the second Carnarvon expedition.

Dr. Breasted has gone as head of an organization sent out by the Oriental institute of the University of Chicago. The expedition will seek for new details of the ancient doctrines and beliefs of the 4,000-year-old religion of Egyptian feudalism. It is planned to make hand copies of the Egyptian hieroglyphics found inscribed on the inner surfaces of the sides and top of the old feudal coffins. These texts contain religious beliefs prevalent in Egypt at 2000 B. C., according to Prof. Breasted.

"These texts were originally supplied to the coffinmakers by the Egyptian priests some 4,000 years ago," Prof. Breasted said. "Scribes filled the inner surfaces of the coffins with pen and ink copies of all the available texts.

"However, these texts are often inaccurate. It is found that the same chapter may have been repeated in one coffin from three to five times. Even in the repetition there are found to be discrepancies in copying. These are of no scientific value until they have all been collected, sorted and published as a whole."

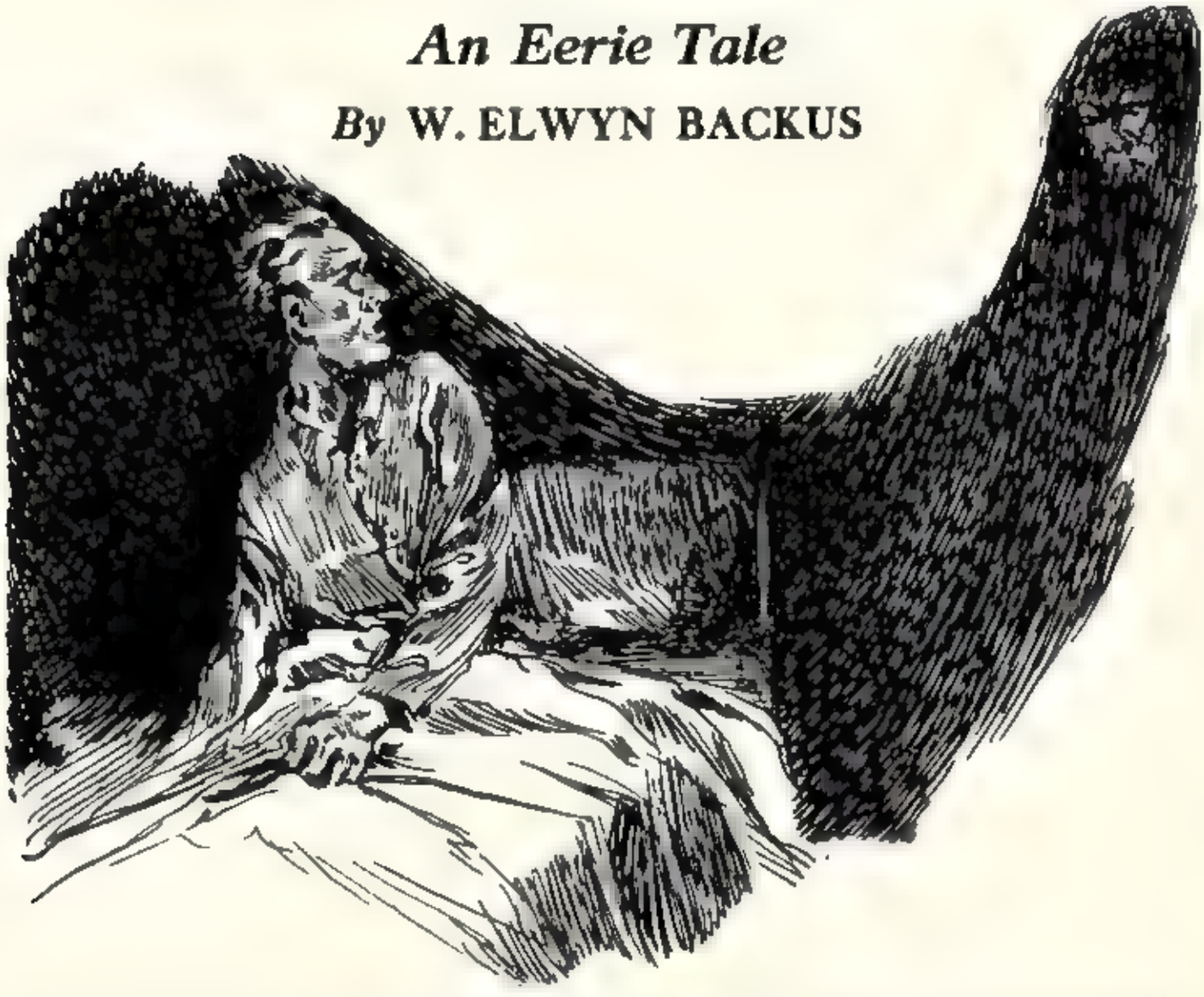
The expedition will go from Cairo up the Nile and then through the Sinaitic peninsula, where it is hoped to find some rare specimens of the coffin texts for the oriental institute collection of the University of Chicago. No excavations will be made during the trip, Prof. Breasted said.

Grisly Horror Lurked in

THE HALL BEDROOM

An Eerie Tale

By W. ELWYN BACKUS



A VICIOUS gust of wind shook the building roaring off across the fields, dwindling to a rumbling sigh, only to give way to another terrific blast. With each fresh onslaught a deluge of rain swished against the windows till it seemed to the occupants of the big, raftered room that the lodge was about to be washed from its foundations. The leaping flame in the great open fireplace cast weird, elusive shadows upon the walls and upon the pensive countenances of the five well-groomed men about the fire.

The room in which they sat was the living room of the comfortable country lodge belonging to Dr. Berg Herzog, A. B., LL. D., renowned nerve specialist, who was included in the group. They had been discussing psychology, and from that had drifted on to spiritualism. Every one of the doctor's guests was a practical, successful business man, who had little time, ordinarily, to give to the latter subject, were he interested. But tonight, the tumult of the elements without, the eerie shadows, and the insinuating warmth and comfort of the luxurious room combined to produce a tolerant consideration even of spirits.

"Assuming the existence of departed spirits desiring to communicate with us, how, then, shall they find a practical way to do so?" came querulously from Masters, dyspeptic and born cynic.

"You don't expect them to step up and beat a Morse tattoo on your skull, do you?" drawled Jim Reynolds, who was distinctly not dyspeptic, and who was inclined to frivolous wonder that anyone should coddle that inconvenient malady.

"I don't think you'll find the spirits seeking 'practical' means of communication, but rather the opposite," ventured the doctor, with a smile. "The subconscious mind presents the likeliest medium."

"A lot of bunk," pronounced Masters.

"What became of that fellow—Nordmann, I believe you said his name was—who was afflicted with the illusion of the 'spook' eyes, Berg?" asked Gordon Sherwood, a close friend of Doctor Herzog's.

The doctor stared into the fire awhile before answering. Another blast of wind wrenched at the solidly built lodge, as though about to lift it bodily

■

Stray drops of rain, driven down the chimney, sizzled in the blaze.

"Gentlemen," he said presently, "that was one of the strangest cases I ever had. It was in my mind when Gordon, here, mentioned it. I consider it a good example of what I shall call 'crime psychology'. Whether there is more to it than that you may judge for yourselves; I am going to tell you about it."

THIS Nordmann was a powerful specimen of manhood when he first came to see me, despite the fact that he had been drinking a great deal more than was good for him: A big Scandinavian, with heavy, brutal features; about thirty-five. A livid scar, running from the corner of his chin past his right eye, narrowly missing it, gave him a sinister look, though he was dressed well and with fairly good taste. There was a curious suggestion of pathos about the fellow in spite of his evident strength.

His story was an odd one: He had recently arrived in New York and had engaged a room in a lodging house. It was in this room, a few days after he had taken possession of it, that a strange phenomenon first troubled him.

He admitted drinking pretty heavily since his arrival. He had come home as usual one night, about eleven-thirty, full of booze, but able to walk straight and to know what he was doing—he boasted that he could carry more and remain soberer than any other man alive. Sitting on the edge of his bed, removing his shoes, his eyes roved about the room. The gas jet was not lit, but a fire burned low in the gas grate.

A single picture hung in his room, depicting a country landscape during the winter, with a woods in the background. I recall his painstaking description of the scene, and I wondered at the time why he should lay so much stress on it. The wintry bleakness of the landscape, and the dismal woods, seemed to irritate him.

That night, as his gaze wandered to the picture, the reflection of the flickering grate fire on its glass face alone marking its position on the dark wall, a chill ran through his veins. Within the frame two tawny points of light slowly appeared and glared balefully out at him. He got the impression that a pair of eyes were watching him as from a great distance—out of the woods!

I told him that he had probably been looking at the reflection from some object in the opposite side of the room, or from distant points of light outside shining through his window. But he said the blind was down, and he persisted in referring to the phenomenon as "Eyes." They had recurred twice since then at intervals of three or four days, before he had come to me. Lighting the jet caused them to disappear, he said, only to reappear with the darkening of the room again.

"Can't you give a fellow a shot of something that will chase them away?" he asked, plaintively

"Dragging yourself won't help you," I told him. "Neither will liquor. Quit drinking and give yourself a chance."

He promised he would, paid my stiff fee uncomplainingly and went away.

Two weeks later he was back. His face was haggard and drawn, and he was leaner. I could see that he had been drinking heavily

"Doc," he said, "you'll have to give me something to make me sleep. Them d——d Eyes don't give me any rest."

"You've been drinking again," I accused.

"Well—yes, I did take a few the last day or so. I tried going without it a awhile, but they began coming back every night then, plainer and plainer. I had to take a little drink once in a while or I couldn't o' stood it. That didn't seem to help much either, so I had to get drunk. But it seems like I can't get drunk enough to forget them eyes—and they're there every night now, burning into my brain all the time I'm there. When I ain't looking at the picture I can *feel* them staring out into the room. God! It's terrible." His big voice trailed off into a sort of child-like pathos which might have seemed ridiculous had he not been so desperately in earnest.

"Why don't you try another room—or turn the picture to the wall?"

"They'd follow me, anyhow—like them bells did that Shakespeare fellow I've heard tell about; and I wouldn't touch that damn' picture for nothing!"

I could see that the man was rapidly going to pieces. This thing, imaginary or otherwise, had preyed upon his mind until he was all but a total wreck, mentally and physically. Nothing but an entire change of environment could benefit him. But my curiosity was piqued. I wanted a look at this room of his and the troublesome picture.

So I said, "Suppose you take me up to your room and let me see this picture."

He snatched at my suggestion eagerly. The prospect of someone's accompanying him into that hateful room seemed to cheer him up wonderfully. My car stood in front of my office, and we got in it and drove right over.

On the way he opened up and told me a few things about himself.

It seemed that during the Klondike gold rush he and a partner of his had made a strike and "cleaned up." They had divided the "dust," sold their claim for a handsome sum, and each had gone his way. His partner had been a chap of "learnin'" and with a girl somewhere in the States, while he (Nordmann) had no such ties and preferred to spend some of his suddenly begotten wealth in seeing a bit of the world. He had taken in Paris, London, even Switzerland, but had liked Paris best, with its gay, wild life of the underworld. Finally he had drifted back to the States and New York.

Here he had found himself a comfortable room, not "fancy," but a place where he could feel at home. Having a tidy sum left, with no need to work, he had continued to take life easy. With nothing to occupy his mind, he had begun drinking heavier than was good for him—that is, more than he had been drinking. Then, one night, had come this illusion with subsequent repetitions culminating in his visit to my office.

Throughout his narrative I got the impression, somehow, that he was keeping something back—some dread secret that he guarded. I found myself speculating on a possible connection between the Eyes and his past.

ARRIVING before the house in which he lodged, I found it a fairly respectable looking frame dwelling of two stories, needing a coat of paint, perhaps, but with curtains at the windows and at least a clean vestibule. Nordmann fitted a key into the door and we stepped into a narrow hallway with a staircase leading to the mysteries of the second floor. Up these stairs we made our way in the dim light which struggled through the stained glass of the front door. I caught a glimpse of a white apron and a dust-cap disappearing into a doorway in the back part of the lower passage—his landlady probably.

A dozen steps along a narrow hall at the head of the flight brought us before a door on our right which Nordmann unlocked and swung inward, revealing an ordinary appearing, small room with drawn blind. A bed, washstand, dresser and one chair were its sole furnishings—and a single picture on the wall opposite that against which one side of the bed rested. Although the temperature of the April day without was fairly warm, a low fire burned in the gas grate. The air in the room was stale and unwhole-

fortably warm. It has always been a source of wonder to me how some people can not only live under such conditions, but actually be comfortable. I secured Nordmann's reluctant consent to raise the window. This was by the foot of the bed.

I stepped over to the picture on the other wall expectantly. I don't know what I expected to see, but I was conscious of an eagerness which belied my conviction that this man was simply a victim of a hallucination.

What I saw was merely a cheap print in a gaudy frame, a scene of snow-clad fields with a dark copse in the background. That was all. I turned to find Nordmann regarding it over my shoulder.

"An ordinary enough picture," I said petulantly. "Nothing strange about it. Why don't you quit thinking about these imaginary 'eyes' and be a man. Cut out the booze, keep a little fresh air in the room, and find yourself something to do to occupy your mind during the day."

He seemed to catch some of the spirit of my confidence, and my presence in the room evidently fortified his nerve, for he laughed rather shamefacedly and mumbled some sort of an excuse and promise, adding a plaintive reference again to his inability to sleep.

Realizing his lack of will-power and taking pity on him, I agreed to give him a sleeping potion sufficient for several nights, to enable him to get some needed rest and strength of mind to fight this illusion. That he was suffering from the knowledge of a crime he had committed, I was convinced. I obtained his promise once more that he would let drink alone, but I had my doubts about his keeping it. He also promised me that he would try to get something to do the next day.

Before I left him I took the troublesome picture down from the wall and turned it over to show him that there was nothing unusual about it. It had the ordinary backing of cardboard held in place with small tacks, and was exactly like thousands of other cheap pictures seen hanging about almost wherever one goes. He seemed greatly relieved at this treatment of the thing, and even ventured to rap it recklessly a couple of times just to show his careless disregard of it. Then we hung it up again.

I took a look around for some object which might be responsible for the reflection of two such points of light as he had described, but I must confess that I discovered nothing of the kind.

He was to come in to see me again a week later, and let me know how he was getting along. But when he showed up again at my office early the second morning afterward, more haggard looking than ever, I was not much surprised. In fact, I had been more than half expecting him. I could see that he was tremendously excited and nervous to an extreme.

My heart went out to the poor wretch. He was a victim of himself, and there was almost nothing that I could do for him.

"How's tricks?" I asked him, not knowing anything better to say.

"I've been through hell," he choked.

"Sit down and tell me about it," I said, pushing a chair toward him. He dropped into it heavily.

I WAITED patiently while he stared across the room in silence for a minute or more, until I began to think he had forgotten me.

"I took that dope you gave me to make me sleep," he began presently, speaking fast and jerkily, "and got my first night's rest in a long while. That made me feel pretty good, and I went out next morning and looked for a job. I guess maybe jobs ain't very easy to find right now, though, and I didn't do no good. So I got some chow for supper early, then went back to my room to get some more good sleep.

"After you'd had that picture down I wasn't afeard of it any more. So when I got home I turned its face to the wall, sort of as a joke.

"Well, I turned out the light and went on to bed. For a while I laid there watching the back of that picture through force of habit; but I didn't see anything unusual. I began to get pretty drowsy and was about to fall asleep when I had an uncomfortable feeling that Something was watching me from behind—out of the other wall that my bed sets against!"

He paused, and an involuntary shudder ran through his body. This thing certainly had him "buffaloed." I let him take his time about going on.

"It sounds funny, setting here in broad daylight," he went on, apologetically, "but I was afeard to turn over and look; and yet I was afeard more to lay there with my back to that wall. Before I looked I knew what I would see. And the thought of them eyes loose, outside of that picture frame that until then had somehow locked them in, turned me cold.

"Finally I got up enough courage to turn my head. Sure enough, there they were, brighter and greener than ever—and less than three feet away! I could see the pupils in them plainly!

"For a moment I was too scared to move. I seemed paralyzed. Then, all of a sudden, the spell was broken. The next instant I had leaped clear of the bed in one bound, and was fumbling on the mantel for a match.

"I broke two before I got one to burn. All the time I could feel them boring into my back. When I got the gas jet lit and looked again they were gone. The rest of the night I sat up with the light burning. And I turned that picture around again. I wanted to keep them where they belonged."

It all struck me as so absurd that I wanted to laugh; but when I looked at his drawn face, and saw how deadly serious he was, I felt almost guilty. Whatever the cause, I knew that his hallucination was tragically real to him. I cudgeled my brain for some practical means of helping the unhappy man.

"Of course this is all simply a disorder of the mind," I told him. "The 'eyes' are not really there, but you see them just as though they were. Now I can help you if you will help yourself. Will you try?"

He said he would, but he didn't seem very certain about it.

"All right, here's what you must do: First, give up that room. Next, give up liquor, as much as possible; altogether if you can. And get out of the city—out into the open. Find some good, hard work to do where you will be thrown with other men. Don't loaf, and don't remain alone. Keep your hands and mind occupied, and mix with your fellow men constantly. You look husky. Try a lumber camp."

"I have been a lumberman," he said, bracing up a bit.

"Where?"

"Up North," he evaded, after a slight pause.

"All right," I said. "That's your cure. Go to it. If you don't, I'm through with you."

He thought that over a minute. His brain didn't work overly fast.

"I'll do it," he said, presently, with more determination than I thought he was capable of. He added, "And when I'm in shape again, I'm coming back here and show you what there is inside this old husk o' mine."

"That's the spirit," I responded enthusiastically. For the moment I believed he'd do it.

So he went out.

I EXPECTED him back in a couple of days. But he didn't come back the second, nor the third day. A week passed, and another; several weeks and several months in fact, without any sign

of him. His case had interested me strangely. Although I was busy with other matters daily, I thought of him a good deal. Finally I decided to inquire about him at his old quarters. So I drove round there one afternoon.

His landlady came to the door at my ring.

It was plain that she had seen better days. About fifty, rather the worse for wear, she nevertheless had that unmistakable atmosphere of refinement about her which cannot entirely be lost, once possessed. A dust-cap of suspected cleanliness adorned her head. That seemingly inevitable piece of apparel of landladies has always been one of mystery and fascination for me. I will find myself speculating on their origin, function and subtle camouflage so admired by their wearers, and so disconcerting to those who are obliged to regard them.

Yes, she remembered the gentleman in the second-floor-back. The big fellow who used to annoy her other roomers occasionally by falling up the stairs. Otherwise he was a model roomer, always paying promptly in advance, which was more than she could say for some of the others, she confided. He had left her house some months since, but had retained his room, paying her for a year in advance and requesting that nothing in it be disturbed.

Did she know where he had gone? No, she did not. He had left no address and received no mail. He was an odd man, rarely speaking a word to any one except when necessary.

I thanked her and went on. So he had retained his room. Why? Did it hold some strange fascination for him; or, did he merely wish to keep it to test the strength of his cure when he returned? Would he return, or would his determination forsake him somewhere else, letting him hopelessly down into the very depths? These were the thoughts that ran through my mind as I drove home.

One of my questions at least was answered less than a month later, when Nordmann himself walked into my office one afternoon.

Seldom have I witnessed a more striking change in any man. Gone were the haggard lines, the pouches under the eyes and the hollows round them. Hard as nails, his lithe six-feet-two-inches a striking example in physical perfection.

"Ah, you see, Nordmann," I told him after we had greeted each other; "exercise, fresh air and a change of environment turned the trick."

"Yes, that little vacation did me a lot of good, thanks to your getting me started right. But I just let my imagination get my goat before. No more!"

What he had lacked before in confidence he now had in over-abundance. Somehow, I hated to see him go back to that room again.

"Well, I expect you'll want to find yourself some more cheerful quarters now," I ventured.

He looked at me curiously, as though reading my thoughts.

"N-o," he replied. "I figure on going back and laughing at that damn' picture on the wall. I'm going to stay with it until I show it up. I'm going to get even with it!" His voice dropped into a growl.

It was evident that he held a deep grudge against the thing. Just how he could get even with a picture I didn't clearly understand. We shook hands, and he promised to drop in to see me once in a while.

IT happened that I was kept unusually busy for the next three weeks, with the result that I found myself on the ailing list. I needed a rest, and decided to run up here for a long-denied vacation. I arranged with some one to take over my practice while I was gone, and came on. Here I stayed for two weeks.

At the end of that time I returned to the city and my practice.

Half expecting that Nordmann had been in during my absence, I inquired as to whether he had been there; but he had not. There was no good reason for me to bother about him, for, if ever a man had been cured, he had certainly seemed to be when I had last seen him. And yet, his case persistently recurred to my mind. I had an odd presentiment that he was in trouble. The fellow had aroused my curiosity and sympathy both. Recalling his pitiable condition before his cure, I was forced to a measure of admiration over his dogged determination to return to the scene of his previous illusion and conquer it thoroughly. I decided to look him up and find out how he was getting along.

As I approached the entrance to the dingy abode for the third time, I could not suppress a strange foreboding. I dreaded what I might discover within. I mounted the worn stone steps slowly and pulled the old-style bell knob. Somewhere in the inner regions the bell jingled.

Presently I heard footsteps. Some one fumbled with the latch, and the door swung inward a few inches. A dust-capped head peered out at me suspiciously.

"Oh, it's the gentleman that called before," she recited, meaning, no doubt, that she remembered me from my last visit.

She pulled the door open and asked me in. I observed that she was in a state of considerable excitement.

"You'll be wanting to see Mr. Nordmann," she hurried on, before I could add a query to my greeting; "but they've taken him out."

"Taken him out?" I said. "Where? Who?"

"Didn't you know? Something terrible happened last night."

I began to wonder if there was something in premonitions after all.

"What happened?"

"Well, we don't exactly know what *did* happen," she went on, in her round-about fashion. "You see—if you don't mind my saying so—your friend, Mr. Nordmann, was pretty noisy at times. My other lodgers complained sometimes about his stumbling up the stairs at night when he came in. But he always paid me on the dot, and minded his own business. After he came back from that long trip he did pretty well. But of late, he began to get noisier than before, so that I was thinking I might have to ask him to look for another room. He looked so good when he first came back, but he got to looking worse and worse till I was almost afraid to say anything to him about the room even if I hadn't been sorry for him."

I saw there was no use trying to stop her, so I let her go on telling me about the matter in her own way. Sooner or later she would lead up to what I wanted to know.

"Night before last," she continued, "I heard Mr. Nordmann come in about eleven o'clock. He was fairly quiet, and I was just about to fall asleep when I heard him begin thumping about in his room. He was making such a racket that I made up my mind I'd go rap on his door and ask him to be a little quieter. I waited a minute, though, hoping he'd stop; but the noise got worse and worse. It sounded like he was throwing things around—something he had never done before.

"Just then, Mr. Stambley, the man across the hall, knocked on my door and said I'd have to do something or he'd leave, because he had to have his sleep. So I got out of bed, slipped something on quickly, and stepped out into the hall here.

"As I started up the stairs there was a dreadful crash in Mr. Nordmann's room. I was afraid to go up alone then, so Mr. Stambley said he'd go up with me."

At this point in her narrative the landlady paused and indulged in a shudder,

glancing nervously up the dimly lighted stairway.

"Mr. Stambley went ahead, but he didn't seem to be in a great hurry. It seems to me that it took us an age to climb those stairs. Strange sounds were coming from that room. The terrific banging and thumping continued louder than ever, and I could have taken an oath that I heard a growl several times, low and terrible. It went right through me.

"At the top of the stairs Mr. Stambley refused to go on ahead. He reminded me that it was proper that I should be the one to knock on the door and speak to Mr. Nordmann. Well, I saw he was a bit nervous; and what he said was true. So I started down the hall, with him trailing behind me. All the while that awful uproar kept right on. Just as I reached the door to Mr. Nordmann's room there was another frightful crash, accompanied by the sound of falling glass. And I am sure I heard that strange, low growl again over it all.

"I raised my hand and knocked weakly on the door.

"As though in response to a prearranged signal, the uproar ceased abruptly!

"The sudden quiet that followed terrified me far more than the previous din. I was frozen with an unreasoning horror of I knew not what. But I forced myself, somehow, to try the door, only to find, as I had expected, that it was locked. I called out to Mr. Nordmann, but received no answer

"I remembered that I had no duplicate key to that door. It was here that Mr. Stambley seemed to recover from his former trepidation. He tried the door and offered to force it open for me. Convinced now that something dreadful had happened, I told him to go ahead.

"At his second lunge the lock gave way. But the door swung open only a few inches. Some object, lodged behind it, prevented its swinging back further without force. He jammed the door back as far as it would go and looked in, cautiously. I peeped over his shoulder, all a-tremble.

"The light was out, but a low flame flickered in the grate, throwing strange, pulsing shadows about the room. A curious conglomeration of odors pervaded the stale atmosphere. A soft hissing and the faint smell of escaping gas warned us that the gas-jet was still turned on, having, no doubt, been knocked out during the recent disturbance.

"Before I could caution him, Mr Stambley had lit a match. Holding this in shaking fingers, he advanced into the room and lit the jet.

"As the light flared up a scene of utter desolation met our gaze. Indeed, at first sight, the chandelier seemed to be the only thing unbroken. The big looking-glass over the dresser was smashed into fragments. Both chairs and the small table were reduced to kindling. The grate burner was bent awry, and the window blind hung by a corner. The glass of the picture I had put on the wall was broken and its frame oddly distorted!

"At a sharp exclamation behind me, I turned quickly. The obstruction behind the door was explained. Huddled there, half reclining, half crouched, his back wedged against the wall, was Mr. Nordmann! His stout garments were torn to ribbons. One arm was thrown over his face in a pathetic attitude of defense. I shuddered as Mr. Stambley stooped and raised the arm.

"Nordmann was dead! His throat and face were horribly slashed and torn—almost beyond recognition. Mingled with whiskey fumes, and a warm, sickly odor in the room, was an unmistakable animal taint—like that of a dog!"

SHE put her hand to her throat and swayed a moment. Although the scene she had just recalled was one that might well shake any one's nerves, I perceived that she really enjoyed the telling of it. I suspected that her emotion was influenced by a desire to supply a fitting climax to her dramatic narrative. She regained her composure quickly and, thanking me for my proffered assistance, asked whether I should like to see Nordmann's room.

As we mounted the creaking stairs I could not suppress a slight shudder at the thought of that dismal room awaiting us, and of poor Nordmann's last moments in it. But if his landlady was still troubled with the nervousness exhibited the minute previous, she showed no sign of it now. She approached the door and opened it without hesitation. Once more I shivered involuntarily, as I hesitated on the threshold. A moment later I stood within the somber walls of the fateful room.

Everything evidently remained in the same condition as at the time of the tragedy. The landlady murmured an excuse for her neglect. The room presented the appearance of a wrecked barroom. The lone chair had been broken into a dozen pieces as though frantically used as a weapon of defense. Its legs, back and rungs were strewn all about the room, mingled with splinters of the broken dresser mirror. The blind still hung by a corner permitting the passage of sufficient daylight to disclose marks of violent blows upon the walls where Nordmann had evidently struck them with the chair in a vain effort to defend himself. By a miracle, the pitcher and bowl on the washstand had escaped destruction.

My eyes sought the strange picture on the wall. There it hung, its scene of bleak desolation glaring balefully out into the room. I almost hated it at that instant as much as Nordmann probably did. Dark and forbidding, its shadowy background of trees struck me almost as a menace. I wondered why some artists prefer to depict such dreary scenes rather than ones of sunlight and cheer. Then I realized that the whole matter was getting on my nerves.

But the strangest thing about the picture was the odd distortion of its frame, from which the glass had been smashed—or burst. It did not seem to have been struck, but rather to have been spread apart as from the passage of some large body through it! Three corners held and there was not a scratch on it, except where the top strip was mapped in two, the broken ends forced upward. I stepped closer to examine them. A wisp of tawny hair was caught in the splintered wood!

My thoughts leaped to the landlady's mention of the dog-like odor when she had entered the room the night before. Was there some connection between that and this bit of coarse hair? She had known nothing of Nordmann's hallucination; yet she had promptly described the taint in the air as similar to that of a dog!

Idly my eyes strayed along the floor to a point beneath the bed. A scrap of white caught my eye. A moment later I held in my hand a torn sheet of paper on which a few lines were scrawled.

It appeared to be a leaf from a diary, probably jerked out in a moment of alarm. I drank in the words eagerly:

". . . . They are terrible close now. I can feel them on my back like they mite spring out at me any minit. God. How long. . . ."

Here the writing ended in a blot. Doubtless it was while in the act of penning these words that disaster overtook him. It was like a message from the other world!

I looked up to find the landlady, too, reading past my shoulder in great excitement. She gave no heed to my belated apology which I had not thought of in my eagerness to read the scrawled lines when I had pounced upon the scrap of paper

"Was a book found with more writing like this in it?" I asked.

"No," she answered in a whisper. "Nothing has been disturbed yet. You may look about if you wish."

I thanked her and glanced round the room speculatively. If he were writing in his diary when interrupted, tearing a leaf from it, the book should have fallen to the floor

A bottle of ink on the washstand, with stopper missing, caught my gaze. That would be where he sat writing (for there was no table in the room), with his back to the picture. I stooped and looked on the floor about the washstand.

Then I saw it—a cheaply bound, gray-covered volume lying beneath the foot of the bed near by. I picked it up and began turning the leaves excitedly. Yes, the writing was the same—and a page had been pulled out after the last one written on in the book, which was, as I had expected, a crude diary.

"May I have this in remembrance of my friend?" I asked.

I anticipated a refusal, but she acquiesced readily enough.

I put the book in my pocket, and, with a glance at the dark spot on the floor behind the door, I passed out of that chamber of gloom.

Not until I had left the house behind was my curious feeling of oppression dispelled.

Reaching my office again I opened the book with quickening pulse. I don't know what I expected to find, but I hoped to find some solution of the man's strange illusion or obsession there—I call it that for want of a better name. I had no qualms about reading it, for he had told me that he had no living kin. Poor devil—having and seeking no friends, and cursed with an incurable malady of the brain, more dread and fatal than a vendetta. I suppose I was as near to a friend as he had had for a long while. What manner of life had he lived to bring this thing upon him?

THE doctor gazed reminiscently into the fire for a minute. A log dropped apart with a sharp report and a shower of sparks raced up the dark flue. His guests waited intently for him to resume his narrative.

"I have that book here," he said, presently. "I am sure it will be of interest to you. Will you excuse me a minute while I get it?"

He crossed the spacious room to the book-filled shelves which lined another side of the room, and selected a small volume with a sureness suggesting frequent reference to it.

"This, gentlemen, contains Normann's strange account of the last several years of his unfortunate life. I shall quote from it."

He thumbed the worn pages familiarly

"Here is an entry dated about a week after Nordmann had returned, 'cured':

"'July 24, 1901: They are coming back. Tonight I can see them far back in the darkness of the woods—waiting! Soon they will be burning again into my brain and flesh as before.'"

The doctor skipped several entries, selecting another:

"'August 3, 1901: Started to go see the doctor today, but decided not to. I will fight them alone, staying with them till I beat them or they get me. They creep closer, closer every night, stealing forward while I sleep. I dare not destroy their lair and release them again—and I won't run away from them!'"

"Nordmann met his fate on the night of August 10. Here is the last entry he made prior to writing the page which I found on the floor

"'August 9, 1901. Have given up search for work. Foremen say they can't use a wreck. No matter. Now I can have as much rum as I like. Only it no longer dulls their devilish glare. But it helps me laugh at them. They grip my heart with cold fear—yet, somehow, I would miss them if they went away. Big, savage Skag—how he hated me!'"

"Who was Skag?" asked Reynolds.

"Who was the 'Iron Mask'? At what o'clock was Socrates born? Ask him something easy," grumbled Masters, who was, nevertheless, more interested than petulant.

"There's the diary," Reynolds retorted.

"'Skag,' gentlemen," said Doctor Herzog, "was a great Dane that belonged to Nordmann's partner, Emerson, back in 1897, when they made their 'strike' in the Klondike. Nordmann not only tells about the animal in his diary; but confesses to having killed its master and gives a complete account of the events which led up to the deed.

"Overtaken by an Alaskan winter, Emerson and Nordmann were cut off from the rest of the world for months. They had cleaned up more than thirty thousand dollars in 'dust' and nuggets before the winter caught them.

"Many long evenings they spent planning what they were going to do with their riches when they could go 'out' in the spring. But gradually the confinement of their small cabin, the monotony of their restricted diet, and the devil that is in all men resulted in petty quarreling. At first they quarreled simply for want of anything else to do. Generally they quarreled over their gambling, or about Skag, for whom Nordmann had developed a violent dislike that was viciously reciprocated by the animal.

"Yet the quarrel that resulted in Emerson's death was over neither of these things.

"Emerson took to babbling incessantly of the girl who was waiting for him in the States; he had not seen her in a year. Nordmann, growing weary of listening to Emerson's ramblings, passed some remark that Emerson resented. Result. A fight, in which Emerson was shot and Nordmann narrowly missed being chewed to death by Skag. In the end he succeeded in also shooting the frenzied animal, but not before he had received the slash in the side of his face, which left the jagged scar that he carried the rest of his days. Emerson died without regaining consciousness.

"Early in the spring Nordmann slunk out and reached the States. From thence he traveled over the world, trying to forget in a riot of spending and dissipation. Tiring of this finally, he returned to the States and settled down in New York. And there, brooding in his dingy little room, he was first troubled by the illusion of Skag's eyes."

The doctor laid the diary aside and paused a moment reflectively.

"I have now told you all the details known in this strange case," he said. "What was the cause of Nordmann's violent death?"

A hush descended upon the little group. The low moaning of the spent storm added to the atmosphere of mystery.

A harsh cackle of dry mirth broke the spell.

"Bunk—all bunk," rasped Masters.

THE DOOR OF DOOM

A Short Story of Tragic Love

By MARY SHARON

MINERVA LANGDON listened to the regular breathing of the man in the bed, and then, satisfied that he was asleep, slipped out of bed and stole across the room to her dressing-table. Noiselessly opening the drawer, she took out a small glass jar and tiptoed over to his bed. Looking down upon the sleeping man, her lips curled contemptuously. Minerva Langdon felt secure in the knowledge that she could do the thing she had planned without fear of discovery. An item in the morning paper had assured her that the time for retaliation upon the man she hated had arrived. That this man was her husband and that she had promised to love, honor and obey him, mattered not at all.

DR. LANGDON was his wife's senior by fifteen years, and he worshiped her with heart and soul; yet his love for her had not prevented him from joining an expedition to Africa for the Museum. Upon his return, eighteen months later, he learned that the heart of his beautiful wife had not grown fonder in his absence—at least, not for him. He had been supplanted in her affections by Richard Montrose, man of the world, globe-trotter and accomplished lover.

Minerva made no attempt to conceal her love for Montrose, and soon after her husband's return, she asked him for a divorce. Langdon refused, thinking that the affair might prove a fleeting infatuation and he would be able to regain her love.

The Langdon home was a large, old-fashioned Colonial mansion, surrounded by a grove of trees, which quite obscured it from the highway. Since they had spent their brief honeymoon here, Langdon hoped that memory might aid him in his effort to regain the love of his beautiful, titian-haired wife, but Minerva repelled all his advances and made it plain that his very presence was hateful to her.

Langdon wandered disconsolately about the grounds of his estate, accompanied by Hugo, a giant ape he had brought back from Africa. Denied the love of his wife, the doctor sought solace in the company of the beast, which plainly loved him as much as it is possible for an animal to do. Wherever the doctor went, Hugo accompanied him. Sometimes he would walk upright and clutch the doctor's hand, much as a child would have done, but more often he shambled along at the doctor's heels in his peculiar shuffling gait. The sight of the ungainly beast served to heighten the aversion Minerva felt for her husband.

One warm afternoon Langdon was dozing in the hammock when the sound of voices nearby aroused him. He sat upright as he recognized the low, throaty voice of his wife in earnest conversation with Montrose. Not caring for the role of eavesdropper, he stepped boldly around the shrubs which had concealed his presence. The tableau which greeted him brought an involuntary cry to his lips. Minerva coolly disengaged herself from the arms of Montrose and stepped back. The air was electric with possibilities. No one spoke. At last she turned her head back defiantly.

"Well?" she challenged.

"Very well," the doctor told her as he took a step forward.

Montrose was pale. The situation had reduced him to a cataleptic state. He watched Langdon advancing upon him, aware of his intentions, but, like a bird hypnotized by a snake, unable to move. Minerva gave a little cry and ran between them, but Langdon brushed her roughly aside and, leaping at Montrose, drove his right fist squarely into his face. Montrose crumpled up and lay in a heap. Minerva screamed and dropped down beside him. Landon dragged her to her feet.

"None of that." His voice was like the snap of a lash. "I've acted pretty white, up to now. As long as you are under my roof, you will observe the letter of the conventions if not the law. Go to your room."

Montrose stirred and sat up, a look of wonderment on his blood-streaked face. Hugo seemed to enjoy the scene, almost chuckling to himself. An understanding came to him, Montrose rose and awkwardly brushed off his clothing. Minerva glared at Langdon and rubbed her reddened wrists. The doctor took out his watch.

"I'm going to give you a coward's opportunity, Montrose. You should be able to make it to the gate in eight seconds. I shall be timekeeper. If you are longer, I shall send Hugo to bring you back."

Montrose gained courage from the sympathy that flashed from the woman's eyes.

"See here, Langdon—" he began.

The doctor held out his watch.

"You are wasting time, Montrose, unless you wish Hugo to give you a round. I am beginning to count. One—"

Montrose did not linger. One look at the grinning ape sent him flying. He did not make a pretty picture as he fled to safety, and Minerva put another mark down against her husband. She shook her clenched hand in his face.

"Beast! How I wish I were a man!"

A peculiar noise sounded behind him, and Langdon whirled just in time to prevent Hugo leaping at the enraged woman. He called the ape by name and made a clucking sound with his tongue which Hugo seemed to understand, for he sat back on his haunches. Red fire rimmed his eyes and he gibbered and gesticulated angrily at the woman. Minerva fell back aghast at the intensity of the beast's hatred. Completely unnerved by the experience, she allowed Langdon to lead her to the house. Safe inside, she withdrew from the support of his arm and spoke abruptly:

"I am going to demand that you get rid of that ape or chain him up while I am here."

"Hugo would not harm you under ordinary circumstances. He believed you intended to harm me."

Minerva shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well. I shall leave tonight."

The doctor betrayed no feeling at her announcement.

"I have not yet given up my chance to regain your love. A divorce would be contested. A husband has some rights and any court would allow that I have not overstepped mine."

Minerva drew herself up to her full height.

"And a wife does not need to be imposed upon by a ferocious ape. Unless you chain the beast up during the night, at least, I shall not remain another minute."

Langdon bowed.

"Very well. I shall see that he is chained."

And that had ended the episode, but Minerva did not forget the events of the afternoon. And then she read an item in the *Morning Tribune*, which stated that Philip Mendosa, a gardener on the Holbrook estate which joined the Langdon property on the south, had succumbed to an attack of influenza. There was nothing startling about the announcement, but to Minerva it seemed a lightning stroke of fate; for Philip Mendosa shared with her a secret which no one else in the whole world knew. During her husband's absence, Minerva had hired Mendosa to build a cement vault in the basement of her home, in which she was storing gold against a possible elopement. She had bound the superstitious Mexican by strange and solemn oaths until she felt secure in the belief that the knowledge of its existence would never pass his lips, and now it could not, for those lips were silenced forever. Minerva had trusted her secret to no other living being, not even Montrose himself. She had exchanged her jewels and many of her other personal belongings for the gold which now reposed safely in the vault.

After she had read the item concerning Mendosa's death, the thought of murdering Langdon and hiding his body in the vault occurred to *her*, but Minerva knew she could not do it. She was not lacking in physical courage, but the idea of murder seemed too revolting.

However, the suggestion would not down, and at length she hit upon the plan of chloroforming him and placing him in the vault alive. After she had decided to do the deed, she could hardly wait for night to come. The day seemed propitious, for her maid of all work was going to attend a dance at the village, accompanied by the Langdon gardener.

THAT night she secured the jar of chloroform and, satisfied that he was asleep, cautiously lifted the lid and extracted the sponge. As if warned of approaching danger, the doctor moved and threw up his arm. Minerva, watching him dispassionately, smiled cynically as she hear him mumble her name. When his breathing became regular again she held the sponge tightly over his face. It was the work of a moment to overpower the sleeping man. When he relaxed and fell back on the pillow, she turned on the light, and her face beamed with satisfaction as she assured herself that the worst part of her work was done. She knew that he was good for a half-hour at least, but she must hurry if she would finish her plan.

With a flashlight, she started for the basement. With superb coolness, she hummed a little song as she felt her way downstairs. On the landing, she stopped and listened. She thought she heard someone following her, but, even as she listened, she knew this could not be. She hesitated only a second, and then, dismissing her feeling of uneasiness, groped her way down the cellar steps.

As she pushed open the cellar door, she stopped again and listened. Some subtle warning of danger carried to her subconscious mind, and she heeded it without thinking. Her sixth sense told her that danger hovered behind her. A board on the stairs above her creaked slightly. She turned her flashlight toward the spot, but there was nothing.

She thought she heard a rat scurry across the floor in front of her and, making a grimace, she picked her way daintily toward the far corner. She kept close to the wall on her right because she dreaded passing close to the spot where Hugo was chained. She experienced a feeling of repugnance at the thought of being so near the ugly beast.

The silence was oppressive. As the hall which precedes the tempest, so the deathly quiet in the musty cellar seemed to her alert senses to presage some sort of eerie doom. Minerva would not acknowledge her fear, but told herself that in a few minutes her task would be finished and she would be free. *Free!* The word held a world of meaning to the woman who had toyed with the idea for months until eventually nothing else seemed of any moment to her. Even the thought of taking the life of the man who loved her so absolutely that he had tried to keep her against her will, could not deter her from her evil purpose. For five months she had been bargaining and hoarding until the little vault held enough gold to take her and her lover far from the scene of her crime.

She felt along the rock wall until she came to the depression and found the delicate spring which controlled the lock of the vault. Slowly the huge door swung outward. It had been several weeks since she had visited her storehouse and to her sensitive fingers the spring seemed slightly rusty. She tried it twice before she was satisfied that the mechanism was in perfect order, and then, stepping forward into the vault, she picked up a bag of gold which she carried outside and leaned against the cellar wall. She returned and picked up another.

Though Minerva did not realize it, she had hoarded the gold for her flight until it had become an obsession with her and she had come to love the gold for itself. She had become at heart a miser. As she caught the second bag to her bosom, a pleasant thrill warmed her being. She dropped gracefully down upon her knees and, thrusting her hand inside the sack, she brought out a gleaming mass of gold. She directed the rays of her flashlight upon the yellow metal and caught her breath at its beauty.

All thoughts of the man who lay unconscious upon the bed upstairs, as well as those of the man who was waiting to fly with her, vanished as she fondled the golden metal. While on her knees, she heard a sound behind her that curdled her blood. Langdon had failed to chain up his ape. As the shrill burst of simian laughter sounded behind her, Minerva turned and hurled herself frantically against the massive wall of concrete. In another moment the giant ape swung it shut upon her.

WHEN Doctor Langdon recovered from the effects of the chloroform, he searched wildly for his wife. He labored under the delusion that robbers had broken in and had made away with her. His theory seemed partially substantiated when Hugo brought him a bag of gold, for Langdon decided that the robbers had dropped a part of their night's loot in making a get-away. Though the doctor offered large rewards for the apprehension of the "robbers" and the return of his wife, no clue to her tragic end was ever unearthed.

The Final Installment of

THE ABYSMAL HORROR

By B. WALLIS

THE invasion of the Canal was a most convincing and extraordinary proof that these things were endowed with an intelligence other than mere sensory reaction to external stimuli. This invasion was obviously a deliberate movement to attain a further field of action for their expansion. Some inexplicable instinct had informed them that beyond this narrow way there lay a great tract of ocean teeming with edible matter. For at the entrance the adjacent water quickly became congested with the growths forming an enormous crescent-shaped mass many times the width of the far-flung parent belt, and the movement here was more rapidly inward. So much so that in a few hours the first of the invaders had entered the channel.

It had been presumed that the massive gates of the several locks would constitute an effective barrier; though warned by the frightful disasters in Europe, the futility of such a defense might have been gauged, but no cable could convey to the mind the true realization of the stupendous hordes and their invincible progress.

There was no precedent to enable the human brain to grasp the fact that here was life as illimitable and uncontrollable as the oceans.

The watchers by the first gate, a little crowd of engineers, assistants and dark-skinned laborers, gazed in silent awe as the waters below them surged upwards and backwards as a solid mass of writhing monsters appeared almost like a piston rod driving the water ahead of them. No simile commonly used could picture the scene these men gazed upon; the matted mass of worms in an angler's bait-can might faintly indicate their solidity of formation, but nothing save the cinema could impart the terrible forward urge and vast vitality which infused these things. The living torrent came to the great gates, without a second's pause a slimy mass of dark green life arose from the surface. Up and up the face of the gates it ascended, the base of the mound growing greater as the crest arose.

Higher and higher, with a movement almost as the flow of a heavy liquid, the mound reared itself and in a moment was pouring over the top of the gates to the water beyond. Without a break or a gap, as molten metal leaves a crucible, the flow of horrible life went up and on. And then the watchers were compelled hastily to retreat, for the 'planes which had been summoned from the nearby naval base commenced to rain their bombs into the hordes below. For fear of injuring the canal, they had until now reserved their fire; an hour later all their efforts were centered in destroying the channel and so erecting some barrier which these things could not surmount. But the means at hand to effect this programme of destruction were insufficient to accomplish more than the erasing of a gate and putting the sides of the canal with numerous craters.

To have piled an effective barrier across that gap many hundred tons of high explosives would have been necessary and many weeks of strenuous work in the placing of them. Doubtless the great bombs may have resolved millions of the monstrous growths to mere atomic dust, but this deletion had no more visible effect than the extermination of a few thousand mosquitoes in a mud swamp by an enraged sufferer. Had it been possible to flood the canal with gigantic jets of steam and boiling water it might have stayed these things. As it was, by noon the attackers had relinquished their efforts and, flitting from point to point, simply reported the progress of the stream.

There was no more to be done, lacking time to prepare. Civilization had shot its bolt—and been defeated.

To say that the water was completely filled with the writhing shapeless things would be incorrect, for not a drop of water was visible. The water merely permeated the mass as ether permeates all material. The awe-stricken watchers on the banks above remained throughout the night, rooted to the spot by the marvel of their incredible numbers as in silence the nightmare mass passed along.

Their squirming cablelike tentacles in constant movement were every now and again raised in hummocks and ridges as though the pressure from below was too great for the topmost layers to restrain. In those abrupt heavings numerous darker, ungainly masses were shot to the surface for a brief second, to be absorbed again as the wave subsided. To these repulsive masses the tentacles were attached as limbs to a body, and yet the animal impression so afforded was instantly repressed by the curious frond-like appearance of the thick appendages which clustered around every tentacle. No single member of all the ruffle could be traced either to its source or its extremity, so inextricably interwoven were the horrors of that terrible throng.

And ever the horde steadily writhed its forward way until, by nightfall, the van of the invaders had made the passage and the mighty Pacific lay before them. Thus commenced the isolation by sea of the North American continent.

Meanwhile, on the Atlantic seaboard, the drift had appeared as far north as Cape Hatteras in detached hordes which were fast bridging the gaps and forming a connected belt. All vessels in the vicinity of the coast had been hastily rushed either to harbors, or beached and immediately abandoned, for it was known to every country now that those enmeshed foreign craft had, to a ship, vanished as a little later had the *Ariadne*. Beyond the temporary dislocation of internal traffic and transportation—due largely to the natural excitement of the people—the great American continent was not otherwise seriously discommoded.

Later the stoppage of certain supplies of foreign origin would necessarily disrupt many important industries. But regarding the problem of simple existence the nation had little to fear. Of wheat and livestock they had always a surplus for export, coal, iron and timber they possessed in abundance; granting these five commodities, a modern people can maintain a civilization but little altered from their present status.

In Europe one or two of the more favored countries might at a pinch manage to survive, but the majority, now mere assembling plants of others' raw material, must undoubtedly cease to exist either as nations or even as habitations of the human species. A certain

small percentage of the peoples might possibly survive, though how it should be determined who these were to be it was impossible to conceive.

However the decision was reached, it promised a veritable welter of blood and savagery as a prelude. Humanity had suddenly run against a bare unscalable wall in the path of its rapid progress, and it appeared as though in future the movement might well be a retrograde one. These happenings in the New World filtered gradually through to the masses in the storm-tossed European centers and excited but little interest. They had troubles to spare of their own.

Moreover, the fact that so far not a single growth on the land had troubled that nation aroused in the Batsons of a dozen countries an indefinable irritation, it struck them that the common showed undue favoritism from some unknown source. It certainly was strange that from the 35th south parallel north to the Arctic Ocean not a single occurrence of these things had been noted. Probably some atmospheric condition had diverted the fall of the seeds from the continent, or even the path of the giant visitor may have taken a course unfavorable to their descent upon this portion of our planet.

However it happened, only in the extreme south of the Argentine were the terrestrial growth at that date discovered. The most strenuous endeavors of every nation concerned would be immediately turned to confining them to this small area, though the success of this undertaking was extremely doubtful.

Batson read of this in a copy of the *Telegram*—which had cost him the sum of one shilling. The paper consisted of a single sheet containing cables from abroad, telephone and wireless messages from the continent and home points, and sundry government proclamations. He learned—with some regret—that he had not remained to witness the astounding spectacle—that Ramsgate, in common with a hundred other coast towns, was now walled in to the seaward by a horde of the growths of such enormous numbers that at low tide they actually formed an embankment some ten or twelve feet in height, built entirely of those left by the receding tide and extending in like depth to the floating drift.

Each tide, the message affirmed, was adding to this awful wall. The pier, upon which he had stood watching, and the long jetty were mere shapeless ridges hidden by countless thousands of these things. Beyond the limit of high tide the beach was untouched by the invasion, and it was quite apparent these unique forms of life were not amphibious, for lying there exposed to the fierce blaze of the sun the stranded things withered and died in a few hours as any other marine life would under similar circumstances.

As they shriveled, a most penetrating stench arose from them—an odor quite distinct from that associated with putrifying tissue. This odor was at first not so offensive, but the longer it endured the more unbearable it became, so sickening and irritating did it grow. They died by billions, the outermost layers of that endless encircling wall, but it was noticed that the under layers, protected from the sun, recovered their vitality on the return of the tide, and ever the dead dried layers on the surface heaved and sank in proof of the surging life beneath.

Curious and excited throngs drew as close as they dared to the wall of life, until in a little while the offensive stench drove the most reckless inland. Intermingled though these things were, yet, bit by bit, one could piece out their structure and form a fair idea of their appearance as individuals, and the majority were agreed that each consisted of a large central mass somewhat the shape and bulk of an enormous gourd. In color a dark oily green, its surface was rough and corrugated as the hide of a crocodile, no orifice of any kind being apparent.

From this mass arose the long tentacles, possibly half a dozen, though they seemed to vary in individuals, as thick at the base as a man's calf and tapering through their twenty *feet* or so of length to the thickness of a man's arm at the base to half an inch at the extremity. These limbs were much more sinewy than the central mass, and about midway down their gruly lengths there sprouted peculiar frondlike appendages. Thick, fleshy, and shapeless, they bore a close resemblance to the grotesque protuberances of a giant cactus. These were practically identical in structure and function, though more massive, with the similar excrescences possessed by the terrestrial species.

Batson read of these matters with great disquiet of soul.

"Eh!" he muttered as a prophetic vision came upon him. "We've got a knockout this time. It ain't war; it ain't nothing we know of. It's the end of everything; these things will sweep the whole world clean; they'll starve us out, choke the seas; and the stuff on land will finish the business."

This latter assertion was the result of the enormous increase of the things in the last few days, despite the fact that every little village had its organized band of destroyers patrolling the vicinity day and night. But it was impossible to check the spread of the stuff. Their generation, coincident with the abnormal heat, had increased so rapidly, and their growth from seed to maturity appeared now to be a matter of a mere twenty-four hours, if not less.

No part of the country was secure from their horrible presence. Moors, woods, fields, even private grounds on the outskirts of the towns, gave birth to their vicious life. But always were they discovered in the vicinity of water or marshy land, and it seemed a certainty that this element was a necessary factor in their rapid early maturing, for this preference was noted in every land beset by them. With consternation it was also noted their intelligence, sensitiveness to environment, call it what one would, apparently had increased greatly, for wherever it was possible by nature of the ground to elude observation there were they found; in copses, hedgerows, tangled clumps of brambles and briars, so common in rural England, they lay in wait for whatever came their way. This applied solely to the immature growths; later, in colonies, they moved slowly across wide stretches of country.

This traveling was undertaken entirely during the hours of darkness and doubtless rendered the capture of their prey a simple matter. For once even a small colony had surrounded the most vigorous animal and whipped their greatly tentacles upon it, there would be no escape; the deadly lances would be applied and the victim's lifeblood drained as it vainly struggled.

Their duration of life was unknown and unnatural; it was their stupendous power of reproduction that constituted the awful menace. From all over the country reports came pouring in of the loss of cattle, horses, and livestock of every description, and also other more terrible losses where human beings had fallen a prey to their rapacity. In the neighborhood of the great moors and forests, where they had, unobserved, formed large communities covering many acres in extent, it was almost impossible to secure labor to work the farms; such was the dread inspired by these lurking, silent, things. For every individual or colony destroyed, three were discovered the following day.

Daily the situation increased in gravity, as though the abnormal heat wave, which never abated a single degree for nearly three weeks, approximated to their natural environment; and daily the food supply of Britain rapidly vanished. At the end of the first week

succeeding the appearance of the encircling drift, flour was being shed with every variety of grain, and even husks and straw treated by a process of maceration. The meat ration had been cut to a pound a week, and that included even horseflesh, but the livestock of the nation would soon be exhausted. Rather oddly, certain luxuries, such as tea, coffee, tobacco—there was no stint of. Anticipating a rising market, the shipments of these things had been unusually heavy only a few weeks previously; stocks on hand would certainly last out the basis necessity, therefore there was no concern to ration them.

These conditions were more or less prevalent in most European countries, though in the south the more excitable Latins had the added horror of civil strife and mob rule to aggravate the disaster, and the natural consequence of this disorganized condition was that actual starvation had in many parts come to the distracted populace. Frantic efforts were being made to tap the vast resources of Russia, Siberia, and the great Slavonic grain producing plateaus, but the time was too short. Had the world been warned twelve months ahead there might have been a fair chance of averting the annihilation which was so imminent.

Huge fleets of air craft were being hastily assembled in every European center, though it was obvious that these could never transport a thousandth part of the supplies necessary to feed the clamoring millions. Even presuming the supplies were available, which was more than doubtful, since both Australia and South America reported the appearance of growths upon the land identical with the European species and it could only be a matter of a few weeks before these countries were themselves confronted with a similar fate. For the secret of their sudden appearance in localities previously immune and the rapidity of their spread was discovered to be due to the peculiar nature of their seeding and the minute size of the seeds.

Like a few of our own large flora, the seeds bore no proportionate relation to their progenitors, being mere specks which the least breath of air would be sufficient to transport. The fertilization and forming of them was conducted in small sacs placed just within the tough membrane covering the large central mass. When fully developed, these sacs burst asunder with such violence that the contents were shot forth for several yards, even as on a much reduced scale one or two of our common fungi perform a similar operation.

Alighting on exposed surfaces, each atmospheric movement carried them still further from their source, while a moderate breeze might easily transport them over considerable distances. One could not strive against wind-blown dust. It was a hopeless struggle humanity was engaged upon, and the end was inevitable—the extinction of every living thing save these terrible aliens, later, possibly, these, too, would cease to exist and the ghastly story of our evolution would have to start afresh.

BATSON secured work in a machine shop, working day and night upon aeroplane fittings, one of the thousands throughout the country. He had not been compelled to undertake this work; though the whole nation was at the disposal of its chosen rulers, there was no need of compulsion; the crisis was too dire and imminent to breed laggards. Wages were non-existent, and cash payments, except for certain minor luxuries apart from foodstuffs, fuel, and transportation, were abolished. Thus all, rich and poor, were practically on the same level, a policy which went far to bind the nation into one cohesive unit.

But daily the rations were narrowing and the weird deadly growths increasing. Though in the struggle to exterminate them, untold numbers were destroyed by the numerous bands of men and women detailed for that purpose, yet it was like trying to mop up the incoming tide with a sponge. By the twentieth of the month the people of the British Isles had realized that now only a miracle could save the nation from extinction. On land there was not a county, a district, or hardly a square mile where the terrible things could not be found in every wood and hedgerow in vast numbers. Worn with the hopeless work and impoverished in brain and body, the people nevertheless fought grimly on, determined to die fighting, as is the habit of English-speaking humanity. But hope was dead. The great drift, encircling the islands, flowed ever inward, each tide spewing up its millions to swell the awful ridge. Only at the mouths of the rivers was this ridge missing. Here the growths invariably parted to left and right directly the influence of the fresh water might be presumed to extend.

For some reason they abhorred fresh water and would not advance a foot within it, for all of their desperate striving to attain the land. The theory was advanced that in the planet of their origin the land was in the process of emerging from the waters, as once, some millions of years gone by, our own continents slowly arose. Probably in this primeval world saline channels and sloughs extended over the greater portion of this low-lying land, forming vast water-logged wastes. Here it was likely this rapacious life found a congenial spawning ground; or, again, it might be that this was their larder, for here in the warm water and mud would be a teeming life almost inexhaustible. Whatever the origin, it could only be some hereditary instinct which drove them landward so inexorably

ON the never-to-be-forgotten twenty fifth day of August Batson wearily trudged to his work. For breakfast he had munched his four ounces of bread, nine tenths of which was husks and chemically treated straw and one tenth flour composed of a dozen different grains. Butter had vanished from the dietary almost from the first day of rationing. Jams and canned preserves had held out until a few days ago. Tea and coffee were still in evidence, though every grain was now boiled until it no longer tinted the water. One ounce of lard per day and a weekly allowance of a pound of gristle or bone, as luck would have it, lent a faint aroma to the mockery of a meal, but even this they had been warned would in a day or two be missing; and the bread dole would cease in less than a week's time.

Experiments had been made with every possible material which might be a source of food supply. Even the cause of all this suffering, the awful growths on sea and land, had been essayed as a means of sustaining life, but they were found to be most deleterious in the smallest quantities, and, in larger, actively poisonous, those partaking being attacked with severe internal pains, ending in partial paralysis and coma. The nation was entering upon its last few days of existence, and the people, in hopeless despair, awaited the end.

Already in other countries less efficiently organized and lacking the Anglo-Saxon stolidity of temperament, hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, had perished. There was no telling accurately, so disrupted were the usual means of tabulating vital statistics.

In the New World conditions, though sufficiently grave, had as yet brought no serious suffering or peril to the people. Possessing vast internal sources of the raw necessaries of life, the people of the United States and Canada were in no immediate danger. In the United States the nation had arisen as one man and demanded that their entire resources and efforts should be devoted to the alleviation and succor, as far as humanly possible, of their stricken fellow men.

The air fleet, already the largest in the world, and possessing craft capable of transporting one hundred passengers across the Atlantic, were even now racing on their homeward trip from the British Isles, loaded to the limit with fleeing humanity fortunate enough to obtain passage. For while all the fleets of the world could not have fed a moiety of those starving millions, yet a certain number might be snatched from the very jaws of death.

Already several thousand had been so transported. Seats in these craft were obtained by ballot, a district being allotted to each vessel as it appeared, the seats having been previously drawn for. Thus there was not a moment's delay, and four days after leaving their home coast they had returned and were disgorging their human freight among which the millionaire and the meanest beggar were shipmates. Thousands of other air craft were being feverishly assembled in every state of the union by men who worked until they dropped at their machines and waiting men snatched the tools from their hands, without a belt being slipped.

The horror of the merciless slaying of a nation, people akin to them in blood and speech, had gripped the humblest worker in the land and controlled his every thought and action. That these aircraft could never be used before the awful tragedy was consummated was realized, yet men had to work, the human brain would not stand the terror of thought in idleness.

BATSON, on that twenty-fifth day of August, had worked steadily through the morning; dully, hopelessly, but doggedly. He knew that death was but a few days from him, yet his own dissolution had the edge of its awe blunted by the enormity of the catastrophe. Probably few in these latter days were supremely concerned over their own little portion in the fast-approaching finale.

The magnitude of the thing overwhelmed the ego; but the common people, such as Batson—though he would have indignantly repudiated the offensive classification—were sick of the waiting and suspense. Therefore, though the work on the craft went ahead with all dispatch, the spirit of the workers had no share in it. The twelve o'clock whistle was on the point of sounding when through the hum of the big lathes broke a swelling roar of human voices.

So silent had been the huge city of late that the unwonted commotion aroused in him an interest out of all proportion to the event. Deliberately, he drew back the lever which broke the couplings of his machine to the main shaft. His neighbors, encouraged by his lead, followed suit. The foreman came striding up with a fierce query in his hard eyes. Batson held up his hand and beckoned for silence, which was a piece of impudence for even a voluntary worker. But the light of battle faded from the foreman's eye and he remained in a posture of intense alertness; the drone of the lathes no longer intervening, the full volume of the distant cheering came through the open windows with startling import. For it was cheering, salvo after salvo of unrestrained emotion; sustained, swelling, no listener could miss the note of enthusiasm and tense joy which pulsed in the sound. As they stood, mute and wondering, the sound drew nearer, as though thousands closer had caught the infection.

"What the dickens?" queried Batson of no one in particular.

"By Jove! what?" remarked his neighbor.

"'Oo the 'ell?" ejaculated his mate.

Then, without another word, in a second the open door was jammed with struggling men. In a staggering knot they reached the street. From every door similar little crowds were being shot forth. At the end of the street, several blocks away, a man appeared in the center of the road. He was running madly, hatless coatless, arms waving, and as he ran he was shouting vociferously in a shrill falsetto which carried to them clearly:

"Praise the Lord of Judah! We're saved! The —— are going to hell!"

And some other things he bawled, but they were so interlarded with inconsequent profanity that they conveyed no meaning. Likely enough, he was a decent family man, but now he was for the time merely a foul-mouthed lunatic.

As the watchers stared, the cheering came racing to them, spreading fanwise in every direction. Street after street, block after block, the frenzy of sound was growing rapidly into the roar of millions of delirious humanity. None could resist the call of that mad joy, and in a moment the cobbled street was clanging with the racing feet of hundreds drawn by the infection of that high emotion. And suddenly they found themselves surrounded by a throng of dancing, singing, yelling, maniacs; or apparently they were, for men were revolving rapidly in the embrace of other men, progressing in an impromptu waltz, obviously indifferent and unaware of any known objective. Others were throwing aloft their headgear and coats and yelling with mirth as they witnessed them fall to be instantly stamped underfoot by their companions.

Many were insanely fighting with both foot and fist, though, lacking the will which usually accompanies such efforts, no great damage seemed to result. And amidst the Bedlam of noise and motion there arose high-pitched callings on the name of their Author, bawlings of intense emotion, even supreme adoration.

Women with dishevelled tresses and staring eyes, some singing, some praying in hysterical fervors, many with tears streaming down their flushed cheeks, ran by the side of the men. The majority of these women could be classed at a glance, their trade had stamped them ineffaceably; harpies and harlots of the lowest type, women whose emotions had never known the leash of spiritual control, nevertheless not one but was swayed at the moment by an intense joy which was not entirely selfish or ignoble.

"Here," exclaimed Batson, catching hold of a small man who, laughing foolishly, was engaged most successfully in grinding under foot a hard felt hat, "what the deuce is the racket about? Are you all gone looney, or what?"

"Hooray! Hooray!" bawled his prisoner, squirming in his grasp.

"Stop it!" yelled Batson heatedly, "or I'll biff you one on the snout." And his tone must have carried conviction, for the man eyed him with distinct apprehension and replied sensibly enough:

"'Oo are you talking to? Just try it on. Ain't you 'eard the noos? We're saved; they're going to wipe these bloody things out. A Yank has fixed up some chemical psion; it's sure death to them—all in the noospypers. Le'go my arm, you blarsted fool!" and he wrenched himself free, shouting as he ran "Hooray! Hooray!"

"It's the bloody truth," said a young, brazenly good-looking girl who had been coolly watching the incident, evidently in expectation of witnessing a vigorous rough and tumble. "The little bloke's right. Sort of a plague like—they'll fade out same as snow in hell. They got it in print on the boards, I seen it myself. Praise Gord! we're saved." She suddenly and most fervently shrieked.

For some little while that was the last distinct impression he received; he had a hazy idea that he was dancing and yelling with the best of them, grinning rapidly in other men's faces and thumping their backs as hard as they thumped his; also many other curious and unwonted motions he probably indulged in, but over these the veil of memory is mercifully opaque, and very discreet. Though for the moment the astounding news he had just heard was lacking the

slightest confirmatory evidence, yet the very abruptness and simplicity of the statement carried an immediate acceptance to his starved nerve centers, which long had thirsted and craved for just such a moment.

He must, however have retained a degree of control over his movements, for presently he found that he had reached the vicinity of the publishing district which in London is so strangely compact. Enormous throngs were gathered there, waiting until they could secure a copy from the endless cataract of single sheets the vast presses were pouring forth. In the course of time a very much torn and disgustingly dirty copy drifted into his hands, this immediately vanished into his breast pocket, and by dint of strenuous labor he finally emerged on the outskirts of the dense jam and eventually arrived at his rooms.

There he devoured every smudged and half obliterated word; read of the young American medico—no less or worse an American for the fact that his parents had, prior to his birth, migrated from an unspellable village in Lower Silesia—a brilliant student of Bacteriology in one of the great laboratories. Young Paul Steenhorst, working upon original lines of his own devising, made the discovery which saved the human species from inevitable extinction, and himself incidentally became the most famous man the world has ever known.

There was no lack of material to experiment upon, planes with grappling iron and hook were constantly fishing from the abominable raffle individuals which were immediately forwarded in large tanks to the new nationalized laboratories all over the country. Failure after failure had attended the efforts of the most highly specialized brains in the nation. To the rankly virulent bacilli of Cholera, Typhus, even Plague and Anthrax, these alien growths, while by no means immune, yet betrayed no greater susceptibility than the average human being in a civilized sanitary environment, and the progress of the infection would probably in both cases run a very similar course, a brief period of maximum vigor when the fatalities might number some ten per cent.

There was no reason, however, to expect that even this slight measure of offense would result in more than a mere local activity, or be of the slightest practical value to the starving world. But Steenhorst—divinely inspired as many held—alighted by a devious route upon the *'Micrococcus Phosphoreus* bacilli,' a marine species of bacteria and the origin of the occasional phosphorescence of a few of the lesser crustacea. Unlike the bacilli of the common phosphorescence, which is harmless to its living habitation, the Phosphoreus produced in the blood of the victim a chemical change which caused its rapid decease. The powers and speed of propagation of this species of bacteria bordered on the incomprehensible.

Moreover, for some unknown cause, the victims of its deadly malignity were confined solely to the most insignificant order of crustacea, to which belong the common sandhopper and its near relatives. Yet from the first hour of its introduction to the tanks, there could be no doubt of its virulent activity in this strange nutrient medium. Its rapidity of growth and avidity of attack were astounding, in less than an hour luminous patches could be distinctly traced in the frightful monsters when all light was excluded from the infected tank, and in a couple of hours the whole mass of each horrible captive was glowing as though painted with a coat of phosphorus and betraying an intense unrest, as evidenced by the violent weaving in and out of their tentacles and the incessant contracting and relaxing of their frondlike appendages.

But shortly the motion had ceased and in shapeless, inert heaps they floated just below the surface, while their luminosity was now greatly increased, in spite of the fact that they had ceased to exist!

A hasty microscopic examination, by men whose cold fingers actually trembled as they prepared the slides, revealed the complete destruction of the molecular structure of their circulating fluid by countless billions of bacilli. And even as these men of science stared at one another with a dawning comprehension of the message they had now to give to the world; even on the slides, in the tank, before their eyes commenced that astounding disintegration, a thing without parallel in experience, so rapid was the process of decay in these growths. They appeared to be falling apart and vanishing as the astonished men stared. Whole segments of tentacles became detached and fell away, and in their turn subdivided again and again, until all that could be distinguished was a vivid scarlet-hued area of sluggish liquid—for in the final stages of disintegration some chemical reaction occurred which tinted the putrescence a brilliant scarlet. From start to finish, the entire course of dissolution had not occupied more than four hours, so rapidly continuous had been its progress.

That the solution of the problem had been attained there could be little doubt. But was there yet time to save the teeming millions of Europe, now trembling on the brink of the last bottomless chasm? They could but try, and even as Batson read the bare outlines of these matters, 'planes were swarming above the hordes lying just outside of New York, where the appalling nightmare of alien life had been arrested in their shoreward flow by the fresh water debouching there.

Hovering and swooping like huge mosquito hawks—those voracious winged tigers of the insect world—they almost brushed that densely packed hideous surface as they dropped the contents of many little phials upon the seething mass. It might appear to the unlearned masses could they have witnessed the action, that it was but the play of a child straining to arrest the incoming tide with his tiny breastwork of sand. But the possessors of the farseeing and thoughtful eyes, which scanned the enormous drift from the rear of many a 'plane, knew that upon the outcome of this silent little bombardment depended the fate of hundreds of millions of their fellow beings. And in a few hours those quiet, self-contained watchers knew that humanity had once again justified itself and retained the mastership of the world, had vanquished the enemy, even as our prehistoric ancestors had overcome the terrors which threatened them. For wherever the culture had been released there shortly the movement of the growths became accelerated and troubled, and patches of phosphorescent light gleamed in the depths exposed by the upflung, flogging tentacles. Later these spaces of agitated activity subsided, grew vague of outline, clouded, and finally developed the brilliant scarlet hue; then once again these dead areas were refilled by the surrounding thousands.

But the verdict had been pronounced and again the process would be repeated ever more rapidly to speed on their mission the tiny messengers of death. And now, in a hundred laboratories throughout the country, the deadly culture was being prepared, and roaring 'planes were making to them a stream of the already infected horrible growths.

THAT night Batson, three thousand miles distant, sat drowsing and dreaming over a dirty, torn, printed sheet, sensing in his misty yet strangely accurate way the course of the operations of which he had no evidence.

Drowsed and dreamed far into the night, almost unconscious of the dull roar of the millions holding high revel in every main artery of London town. An unwonted sudden chilliness drew him

from his reverie and, rising, he moved to the wide open window and stood a little while sniffing thoughtfully and happily at the pleasant cool air, then muttered aloud:

"I say, it's damn cool! Must be a change on the way? Thank the gods! Me for the hay and a real sleep tonight." And, yawning, he abruptly closed the squeaking sash, the first time it had been moved for nearly four grilling tragic weeks.

Dawn—his work at the factory had turned him into an early riser—found him fanning a little fire of chips and small coal, no more than sufficient to boil a little kettle in which lay the pulled leaves of the previous day's brewing of tea. As the blaze spread its sinuous fingers amid the fuel, he suddenly realised that he had his hands spread before it with the pose of one who finds the trifling warmth grateful; moreover, he noted that his fingers possessed a hint of that biney tone so common in the dreary short days.

"Cripes! I believe I'm cold! What the deuce is wrong?" he exclaimed in astonishment, as his gaze wandered from the fire to the window, and there it rested for a moment; for the glass was clouded with condensed moisture evidencing the low temperature of the outside air.

"Phew! What!" he ejaculated, and, striding to the window, he threw up the lower sash.

The window faced to the west, and no touch of the newly-risen sun had fallen upon it as yet, or upon the moribund narrow box of unhealthy-looking soil which lay on the ledge. A solitary, stunted, and grime-laden geranium hibernated in this receptacle, possibly because it lacked the vitality to accomplish the feat of expiring. The leaves had drooped even lower than usual and upon each mournful surface there lay a thin, but undeniable, coating of white hoar frost!

"Well I'm blowed! It's a frost! Whoever heard of a frost in August!" he muttered aloud, as he stretched out his hand and gently felt one of the whitened leaves. The coating instantaneously dissolved into moisture, but moisture that the ice king had breathed upon.

For a little space Batson gazed upon it, curiously watching its white virginity vanish in the rapidly warming atmosphere; and then, still pondering, returned to his miserable breakfast.

And such was his reception of the earliest frost ever known in the British Isles south of the Tweed—a frost which accomplished in a few hours results which the entire human species had, up to its coming, failed most dismally to effect.

Early in the day strange rumors of a miraculous debacle which had overtaken the swarming terrible invaders of the land passed from one man to another. Before noon these rumors were lifted from the category of mere senseless hearsay to the dignity of substantiated fact. Again the huge bulletin boards sent the pulse of the masses throbbing with the thrill of the news they imparted; telling of the fearful growths all over the country now lying still and lifeless, slain in a moment by the chill breath of the phenomenal frost.

Singly, in colonies, in frightful huge communities, they lay dead everywhere. There was no doubt of the fact, the news had not been made public until verified from a hundred widely separated points. It was no mere local phenomenon, or even confined to the British Isles. From central France, Germany, and the great Slavonic plateau, right to the Arctic circle, the frost, with more or less rigor, had descended.

It was assumed that either these extraordinary organisms had never in their progenitors been subjected to such a reduction in the temperature, or else, partaking of the nature of our annual flora at the approach of winter, their structure suffered a similar decay and dissolution, to reappear only in their descendants, having previously thrown abroad the contents of their seed containers. Possibly the temperature in their planet of origin was more stable, and the year many times the length of ours.

However, the great and main fact was that the visitation had swept the country practically clear of the horrible things, though in certain protected localities a few isolated individuals might still exist.

The pinnacle of the crisis had been reached; on the very edge of extinction, the British people had been succored: a small percentage did, indeed, fail to survive the hardships of malnutrition and consequent depressed vitality, but, for the great majority, the encircling belt of terrible life was pierced in the nick of time.

It occurred at Southampton. Here the efforts of the nation had been concentrated; for one thing, it was the logical point for the rapid handling of freight, and, for another, the narrow channel between the Isle of Wight and the mainland was alone at the entrance subjected to the pouring of the incalculable millions of growths composing the stupendous drift. In this channel was deposited the greater part of the bacterial culture which was rushed across the Atlantic in less than three days after the first cable had been received.

Over five hundred vessels were at the time in the English channel, mostly anchored in certain shallow stretches, for never a breath of air had ruffled the water for the last three weeks. Practically all of them had left their distant home ports previous to the abrupt appearance of the frightful invasion, and by the time they reached these waters every port within their fuel radius had been closed. In their holds they held the foodstuffs for the lack of which millions were on the verge of extinction. Efforts had indeed been made to transfer a portion of their cargoes to land by fleets of aircraft, but the endeavor, though persisted in, was a failure to any practical extent, for the largest 'planes could not transport more than a few tons at a time, and it was a most difficult and lengthy business to load them with even this trifling cargo. The great dirigibles were entirely too clumsy for the work: therefore the total results to date had been inappreciable.

These vessels were now gathered in the vicinity of the port in readiness to make any daring move, should there prove to be the least chance of success. Men now, as in the world war, gave no heed to their lives if the great objective could be forwarded by their loss. It was an inspiring yet nerve-racking sight for the vast crowds who were watching from the low hills and coastline which confine that channel. As far as the eye could reach beyond the five mile wide belt of heaving abomination, there were ships in lines and squadrons; south, east, and west, ships of every size and dimension. Levantine tubs of a thousand tons or less, laden with dried fruits and a hundred luxuries; mammoth American cattle and grain carriers; Australian and South American ships, filled to the hatches with scores of thousands of frozen and chilled cattle and sheep, though an increasing number of these had daily been dumped overboard as fuel ran shorter and shorter. Hardly a vessel but held in its bowels the lives of thousands of starving, desperate humanity.

In twenty-four hours the effect of that deadly culture was plainly visible to the distant throngs; the entire channel was a strip of brilliant scarlet, and hourly it was extending to the waters adjacent. To the *Glencamie Castle*, five-thousand-ton grain carrier of the Kinaird Line, fell the honor of being the first craft to pierce that five-mile-wide belt of horrible life. Many times it had seemed as though the attempt would be futile and the screws become fouled; but

with safety valves recklessly weighted, they burst through the dying masses at the entrance to the channel and steamed into the scarlet stretch of the already dead growths.

Other craft were close behind, and before the channel closed again, through the blind surge of the immense pressure from the open sea, a score of great vessels had run the gauntlet and drawn in to the docks, where for days thousands of men had striven to clear the huge ridge of putrifying things which were piled twenty feet high on the wharves, and in a little the plague could be seen working among the fresh inpouring and spreading rapidly in the great belt outside.

At once the news was flashed to every center of the civilised world, and the despair and chaos of the nations was changed in a moment to a delirium of elation, and aircraft by the hundred were madly driven at maximum of speeds, transporting the precious little packages of infection in every direction. A little later, in scores of ports, great vessels hurled their thousands of tons at full speed into the stricken things. Many found themselves surrounded by the myriads not yet affected and were overwhelmed by them even as those doomed ships of weeks before had been.

But the individual no longer weighed in the balance when every minute was precious; everywhere vessels staggered through the drift and brought life and hope to the starving millions; and everywhere the deadly little bacilli were spreading and speeding like a forest fire through the enormous mass of alien life, changing it in a few short hours to mere putrifying scum.

And thus passed the most terrible menace which man so far has striven with. He triumphed, but the margin between him and total extinction had been well-nigh imperceptible. As it was, before winter had set in the Phosphorens had practically completed its deadly work, and only in a few secluded islands did the marine growths linger. On land, too, it was shortly discovered that the same ally was as virulent an enemy of the terrestrial types as it was to the marine, and the remnants left by the preceding cold snap were quickly exterminated, for now the whole world was centered on this business, and nations needed neither treaties or commissions to render aid wherever it was required.

Though there could be little doubt but there would be sudden outbreaks of those fearful things for many years to come, yet man had the assurance that now he had a weapon capable of overcoming the menace of their marvelous vitality and stupendous power of propagation. That such a huge volume of decay could encompass our coasts and lay the land under the blight of its fearful stench, without most serious results ensuing, was not possible. The reek of that filthy, putrifying multitude was beyond words.

While in no manner similar to the stench of decay we associate with the process, yet it possessed an irritant and sickening quality many times more distressing and incredibly penetrating. There was no escaping it; it hung over the land and water as an almost visible pall and tainted every scrap of food and drop of water with its nauseating properties. That sickness should sweep the world was inevitable, and, considering the low ebb of vitality then prevalent, it was nothing short of a miracle that the toll of life was no more. A mere five per cent of the European population—on the American side the mortality was considerably less—fell a prey to what became commonly known as the "Green Rot." That it was a hitherto unknown variety of plague was the sole explanation the masses ever assimilated. The symptoms were the appearance of greenish blotches upon the abdomen and chest, these rapidly spread and became decomposed areas of rotting flesh, boring like ulcers into the vital organs and causing intense agony.

A great variance in the susceptibility of individuals to its virulence was the most extraordinary feature of the occurrence. Many expired within a few hours, practically rotted masses of corruption. Others suffered a little space in great agony, then the symptoms abated, and in a few days the patient was as sound as ever. If one survived twenty-four hours recovery was assured; no more than this fact was ever definitely agreed upon, and no antidote was discovered.

However, like all human ills, this strange visitation ran its course and passed away. Winter and the ceaseless violent gales which sweep the northern seas at that season in the course of time dispersed the slime and corruption from the water and the great wall of death which had encompassed thousands of miles of coastline from the Mediterranean to the Arctic, so that by the spring naught remained of all that enormous host save the memory that time itself could never efface.

It was a humbled and sobered humanity that emerged from the ordeal. The proud conceit of their vaunted progress no longer swayed the nations, and man forgot his former dream of some future day scaling the gulf which separates him from the neighboring heavenly bodies. Rather was there a dread that the inhabitants of those worlds might again, through a similar mischance, leap that gulf and arrive to wreak their merciless will upon our planet. The old order of assured dominance and pride of the stability and security of the species had been shattered, and humanity became more reverent and humble.

The antagonisms of race, so fiercely maintained in former days, were largely obliterated by the realization that, faced by a common foe, boundary lines and commercial jealousies had in a twinkling vanished, and mankind awoke to the fact that North, South, East and West, the human race was but a single family isolated in the immensity of creation. A truer sense of proportion came to the world, and the insanity of slaying one's neighbor, who might well tomorrow be one's salvation, was born upon all men. Not that bickerings, or wars, ceased, but anger was neither so hasty or prolonged, and the intense bitterness toward an opponent, which had previously swept the entire world into a mad carnival of murder, was now an impossibility. As in the mass, so in the individual, the mental outlook had undergone a radical change.

One likes to think of Batson deserting his desk and invertebrate existence for the whirr of a Cyclopean lathe, which daily in his hands gave to the world a lasting monument of the fact that once a living man had fulfilled the object of his being and left his fellows the richer for his presence.

THE END

A Grim Tale of Ghouls
By a Master of Weird Literature

THE HOUND

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

IN MY tortured ears there sounds unceasingly a nightmare whirring and flapping, and a faint distant baying as if some gigantic hound. It is not dream—it is not, I fear, even madness—for too much has already happened to give me these merciful doubts.

St. John is a mangled corpse, I alone know why, and such is my knowledge that I am about to blow out my brains for fear I shall be mangled in the same way. Down unlit and illimitable corridors of eldritch phantasy sweeps the black, shapeless Nemesis that drives me to self annihilation.

May heaven forgive the folly and morbidity which led us both to so monstrous a fate! Wearied with the commonplaces of a prosaic world, where even the joys of romance and adventure soon grow stale, St. John and I had followed enthusiastically every aesthetic and intellectual movement which promised respite from our devastating ennui. The enigmas of the symbolists and the romances of the pre-Raphaelites all were ours in their time, but each new mood was drained too soon of its diverting novelty and appeal.

Only the sombre philosophy of the decadents could hold us, and this we found potent only by increasing gradually the depth and diabolism of our penetrations. Baudelaire and Huysmans were soon exhausted of thrills, till finally there remained for us only the more direct stimuli of unnatural personal experiences and adventures. It was this frightful emotional need which led us eventually to that detestable course which even in my present fear I mention with shame and timidity—that hideous extremity of human outrage, the abhorred practice of grave-robbing.

I cannot reveal the details of our shocking expeditions, or catalogue even partly the worst of the trophies adorning the nameless museum we prepared in the great stone house where we jointly dwelt, alone and servantless. Our

museum was a blasphemous, unthinkable place, where with the satanic taste of neurotic virtuosi we had assembled an universe of terror and decay to excite our jaded sensibilities. It was a secret room, far, far underground; where huge winged daemons carven of basalt and onyx vomited from wide grinning mouths weird green and orange light, and hidden pneumatic pipes ruffled into kaleidoscopic dances of death the lines of red charnel things hung in hand woven on voluminous black hangings. Through these pipes came at will the odors our moods most craved, sometimes the scent of pale funereal lilies, sometimes the narcotic incense of imagined Eastern shrines of the kingly dead, and sometimes—how I shudder to recall it!—the frightful, soul-upheaving stenches of the uncovered grave.

Around the walls of this repellent chamber were cases of antique mummies alternating with comely, lifelike bodies perfectly stuffed and cured by the taxidermist's art, and with headstones matched from the oldest churchyards of the world. Niches here and there contained skulls of all shapes, and heads preserved in various stages of dissolution. There one might find the rotting, bald pates of famous noblemen, and the fresh and radiantly golden heads of new-buried children.

Statues and paintings there were, all of fiendish subjects and some executed by St. John and myself. A locked portfolio, bound in tanned human skin, held certain unknown and unnamable drawings which it was rumored Goya had perpetrated but dared not acknowledge. There were nauseous musical instruments, stringed, brass, and wood-wind, on which St. John and I sometimes produced dissonances of exquisite morbidity and cacodaemoniacal ghastliness; whilst in a multitude of inlaid ebony cabinets reposed the most incredible and unimaginable variety of tomb-loot ever assembled by human madness and perversity. It is of this loot in particular that I must not speak—thank God I had the courage to destroy it long before I thought of destroying myself!

THE predatory excursions on which we collected our unmentionable treasures were always artistically memorable events. We were no vulgar ghouls, but worked only under certain conditions of mood, landscape, environment, weather, season, and moonlight. These pastimes were to us the most exquisite form of aesthetic expression, and we gave their details a fastidious technical care. An inappropriate hour, a jarring lighting effect, or a clumsy manipulation of the damp sod, would almost totally destroy for us that ecstatic titillation which followed the exhumation of some centuried, grinning secret of the earth. Our quest for novel scenes and piquant conditions was feverish and insatiate—St. John was always the leader, and he it was who led the way at last to that mocking, accursed spot which brought us our hideous and inevitable doom.

By what malign fatality were we lured to that terrible Holland churchyard? I think it was the dark rumor and legendry, the tales of one buried for five centuries, who had himself been a ghoul in his time and had stolen a potent thing from a mighty sepulchre. I can recall the scene in these final moments—the pale autumnal moon over the graves, casting long horrible shadows; the grotesque trees, drooping sullenly to meet the neglected grass and the crumbling slabs, the vast legions of strangely colossal bats that flew against the moon; the antique ivied church pointing a huge spectral finger at the livid sky; the phosphorescent insects that danced like death-fires under the yews in a distant corner; the odors of mould, vegetation, and less explicable things that mingled feebly with the night-wind from over far swamps and seas, and, worst of all, the faint deep-toned baying of some gigantic hound which we could neither see nor definitely place. As we heard this suggestion of baying we shuddered, remembering the tales of the peasantry; for he whom we sought had centuries before been found in this selfsame spot, torn and mangled by the claws and teeth of some unspeakable beast.

I remember how we delved in this ghoul's grave with our spades, and how we thrilled at the picture of ourselves, the grave, the pale watching moon, the horrible shadows, the grotesque trees, the titanic bats, the antique church, the dancing death-fires, the sickening odors, the gently moaning night-wind, and the strange, half-heard, directionless baying, of whose objective existence we could scarcely be sure.

Then we struck a substance harder than the damp mould, and beheld a rotting oblong box crusted with mineral deposits from the long undisturbed ground. It was incredibly tough and thick, but so old that we finally pried it open and feasted our eyes on what it held.

Much—amazingly much—was left of the object despite the lapse of five hundred years. The skeleton, though crushed in places by the jaws of the thing that had killed it, held together with surprising firmness, and we gloated over the clean white skull with its long, firm teeth and its system sockets that once had glowed with a charnel fever like our own. In the coffin lay an amulet of curious and exotic design, which had apparently been worn around the sleeper's neck. It was the oddly conventionalised figure of a crouching winged hound, or sphinx with a semi-canine face, and was exquisitely carved in antique Oriental fashion from a small piece of green jade. The expression on its features was repellent in the extreme, savoring at once of death, bestiality, and malevolence. Around the base was an inscription in characters which neither St. John nor I could identify; and on the bottom, like a maker's seal, was graven a grotesque and formidable skull.

Immediately upon beholding this amulet we knew that we must possess it; that this treasure alone was our logical pelf from the centuried grave. Even had its outlines been unfamiliar we would have desired it, but as we looked more closely we saw that it was not wholly unfamiliar. Alien it indeed was to all art and literature which sane and balanced readers know, but we recognised it as the thing hinted of in the forbidden "Necronomicon" of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, the ghastly soul-symbol of the corpse-eating cult of inaccessible Leng, in Central Asia. All too well did we trace the sinister lineaments described by the old Arab daemonologist; lineaments, he wrote, drawn from some obscure supernatural manifestation of the souls of those who vexed and gnawed at the dead.

Seizing the green jade object, we gave a last glance at the bleached and cavern-eyed face of its owner and closed up the grave as we found it. As we hastened from that abhorrent spot, the stolen amulet in St. John's pocket, we thought we saw the bats descend in a body to the earth we had so lately rifled, as if seeking for some cursed and unholy nourishment. But the autumn moon shone weak and pale, and we could not be sure.

So, too, as we sailed the next day away from Holland to our home, we thought we heard the faint distant baying of some gigantic hound in the background. But the autumn wind moaned sad and wan, and we could not be sure.

II

LESS than a week after our return to England, strange things began to happen. We lived as recluses; devoid of friends, alone, and without servants in a few rooms of an ancient manor-house on a bleak and unfrequented moor; so that our doors were seldom disturbed by the knock of the visitor.

Now, however, we were troubled by what seemed to be frequent fumblings in the night, not only around the doors but

around the windows also, upper as well as lower. Once we fancied that a large, opaque body darkened the library window when the moon was shining against it, and another time we thought we heard a whirring or flapping sound not far off. On each occasion investigation revealed nothing, and we began to ascribe the occurrences to imagination alone—that same curiously disturbed imagination which still prolonged in our ears the faint far baying we thought we had heard in the Holland churchyard. The jade amulet now reposed in a niche in our museum, and sometimes we burned strangely scented candles before it. We read much in Alhazred's "Necronomicon" about its properties, and about the relation of ghosts' souls to the objects it symbolised, and were disturbed by what we read.

Then terror came.

On the night of September 24, 19—, I heard a knock at my chamber door. Fancying it St. John's, I bade the knocker enter, but was answered only by a shrill laugh. There was no one in the corridor. When I aroused St. John from his sleep, he professed entire ignorance of the event, and became as worried as I. It was that night that the faint, distant baying over the moor became to us a certain and dreaded reality.

Four days later, whilst we were both in the hidden museum, there came a low, cautious scratching at the single door which led to the secret library staircase. Our alarm was now divided, for besides our fear of the unknown, we had always entertained a dread that our grisly collection might be discovered. Extinguishing all lights, we proceeded to the door and threw it suddenly open, whereupon we felt an unaccountable rush of air, and heard, as if receding far away, a queer combination of rustling, tittering, and articulate chatter. Whether we were mad, dreaming, or in our senses, we did not try to determine. We only realised, with the blackest of apprehensions, that the apparently disembodied chatter was beyond a doubt *in the Dutch language*.

After that we lived in growing horror and fascination. Mostly we held to the theory that we were jointly going mad from our life of unnatural excitements, but sometimes it pleased us more to dramatise ourselves as the victims of some creeping and appalling doom. Bizarre manifestations were now too frequent to count. Our lonely house was seemingly alive with the presence of some malign being whose nature we could not guess, and every night that daemoniac baying rolled over the wind-swept moor, always louder and louder. On October 29 we found in the soft earth underneath the library window a series of footprints utterly impossible to describe. They were as baffling as the hordes of great bats which haunted the old manor-house in unprecedented and increasing numbers.

The horror reached a culmination on November 18, when St. John, walking home after dark from the dismal railway station, was seized by some frightful carnivorous thing and torn to ribbons. His screams had reached the house, and I had hastened to the terrible scene in time to hear a whir of wings and see a vague black cloudy thing silhouetted against the rising moon.

My friend was dying when I spoke to him, and he could not answer coherently. All he could do was to whisper, "The amulet—that damned thing—."

Then he collapsed, an inert mass of mangled flesh.

I BURIED him the next midnight in one of our neglected gardens, and mumbled over his body one of the devilish rituals he had loved in life. And as I pronounced the last daemoniac sentence I heard afar on the moor the faint baying of some gigantic hound. The moon was up, but I dared not look at it. And when I saw on the dim-lighted moor a wide nebulous shadow sweeping from mound to mound, I shut my eyes and threw myself face down upon the ground. When I arose, trembling, I know not how much later, I staggered into the house and made shocking obeisances before the enshrined amulet of green jade.

Being now afraid to live alone in the ancient house on the moor, I departed on the following day for London, taking with me the amulet after destroying by fire and burial the rest of the impious collection in the museum. But after three nights I heard the baying again, and before a week was over felt strange eyes upon me whenever it was dark. One evening as I strolled on Victoria Embankment for some needed air, I saw a black shape obscure one of the reflections of the lamps in the water. A wind, stronger than the night-wind, rushed by, and I knew that what had befallen St. John must soon befall me.

The next day I carefully wrapped the green jade amulet and sailed for Holland. What mercy I might gain by returning the thing to its silent, sleeping owner I knew not; but I felt that I must at least try any step conceivably logical. What the hound was, and why it had pursued me, were questions still vague; but I had first heard the baying in that ancient churchyard, and every subsequent event including St. John's dying whisper had served to connect the curse with the stealing of the amulet. Accordingly I sank into the nethermost abysses of despair when, at an inn in Rotterdam, I discovered that thieves had despoiled me of this sole means of salvation.

The baying was loud that evening, and in the morning I read of a nameless deed in the vilest quarter of the city. The rabble were in terror, for upon an evil tenement had fallen a red death beyond the foulest previous crime of the neighborhood. In a squalid thieves' den an entire family had been torn to shreds by an unknown thing which left no trace, and those around had heard all night above the usual clamor of drunken voices a faint, deep, insistent note as of a gigantic hound.

SO at last I stood again in the unwholesome churchyard where a pale winter moon cast hideous shadows, and leafless trees drooped sullenly to meet the withered, frosty grass and cracking slabs, and the ivied church pointed a jeering finger at the unfriendly sky, and the night-wind howled maniacally from over frozen swamps and frigid seas. The baying was very faint now, and it ceased altogether as I approached the ancient grave I had once violated, and frightened away an abnormally large horde of bats which had been hovering curiously around it.

I know not why I went thither unless to pray, or gibber out insane pleas and apologies to the calm white thing that lay within; but, whatever my reason, I attacked the half-frozen sod with a desperation partly mine and partly that of a dominating will outside myself. Excavation was much easier than I expected, though at one point I encountered a queer interruption; when a lean vulture darted down out of the cold sky and pecked frantically at the grave-earth until I killed him with a blow of my spade. Finally I reached the rotting oblong box and removed the damp nitrous cover. This is the last rational act I ever performed.

For crouched within that centuried coffin, embraced by a close-packed nightmare retinue of huge, sinewy, sleeping bats, was the bony thing my friend and I had robbed; not clean and placid as we had seen it then, but covered with caked blood and shreds of alien flesh and hair, and leering sentiently at me with phosphorescent sockets and sharp sanguined fangs yawning twistedly in mockery of my inevitable doom. And when it gave from those grinning jaws a deep, sardonic bay as of some gigantic hound, and I saw that it held in its gory, filthy claw the lost and fateful amulet

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Another Big Installment
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DRACONDA

CHAPTER TWENTY

PLUTO'S CAVE

"HOMO after all!" said Henry Quainfan. "*Stupidus*, though, I fancy. See, there are other footprints."

Staring at this one, I had not seen the others, but, on looking, I saw them at once. There were found three perfect ones in all and two imperfect impressions.

"It's my idea," Henry remarked, "that there was only one man here."

"Probably a lucky thing for us," I told him.

"Let us," he said a few moments later, "see if we can find the spot where our Venusian ran the canoe ashore—or whatever that thing was we saw."

Accordingly we proceeded along the water's edge, and, a hundred feet or so beyond the footprints, we discovered the spot.

"Maybe this is dangerous," said I, glancing apprehensively into that inky darkness. "They easily could steal near unseen, spear us or fill us full of arrows."

"I think, Rider, this fellow was alone," Henry returned, "and he is gone."

"But he may not have far to go."

"That is true. But, on the other hand, he may have a long, long way. However, the torch is dying down, it seems we have found all there is to be seen, so let's go back."

We returned to the tent forthwith and awoke St. Cloud, to whom I gave a succinct account of what we had seen, the while Henry stood gazing down the river and musing in silence.

Of course, Morgan had to have a look at those footprints and the spot where the canoe (as we thought it) had been grounded. Henry and I accompanied him, and he prosecuted his examination with many exclamations and uneasy glances into the surrounding darkness.

Indeed, by the way, all things considered, this proceeding on our part (and the previous one) was a risky business, not to use a stronger adjective.

"Maybe," said St. Cloud, directing apprehensive looks into that Cimmerian darkness, "there's a score of them creeping upon us this very minute. If only they haven't got guns!"

"We'd be safer," Henry told him, "if they had."

"Great Jupiter, what do you mean?"

"Why, beings with the civilisation that implies would not be apt to shoot us Terrestrials down in cold blood."

"I'd hate to wager my soul on that," said Morgan. "This is a ticklish business any way you look at it."

"It's plain," Henry said, "that the man who left these footprints is a savage, and savages don't have guns."

"Some savages do," said Morgan. "But how do you know that this Venusian is a savage?"

"Why, look at his footprint."

Morgan looked, but it was patent he saw nothing but a footprint.

"I'm not Natty Bumppo," he said, straightening up.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," Henry explained, "the gentleman never has had a shoe on his foot, and you know that, if he were civilised at all, he would in all likelihood have his feet encased in some sort of footgear."

"Cannibals, maybe," proffered St Cloud.

"Perhaps these Venusians," said Henry, "these savages, are dwellers on the outskirts of a great civilization. Perhaps somewhere down there are great cities, mighty kings and queens—kings with their men-servants and women-servants, their wives and concubines. Probably, Morgan, there are things down there more wonderful than anything ever seen on the earth."

"But here are these savages," said St. Cloud: "they are between us and this maybe civilisation of yours—those wonderful kings and queens. And perhaps, for all we know, down there are things more terrible than anything ever seen on the earth."

"Morgan," Henry laughed, "you're as optimistic as an owl."

"Let's get out of this," returned the other, "though, great guns, going into the light of that fire is only offering ourselves as targets!"

"But, if we put it out," I interposed, "lions—or something more terrible—may come in and gobble us up."

"Precisely," nodded Henry Quainfan. "We're between the devil and the deep darkness. But, as for these Venusians. Morgan, why not give them the benefit of the doubt?"

"Just so," said I; "they may prove to be pretty fine fellows after all."

"I'm from Missouri," St. Cloud told us.

As soon as we returned to the tent, Henry lay down and in a few moments was fast asleep. As has been said, it was now my watch; St. Cloud, though, chose to share it instead of sleeping. The latter, however, he probably would have found impossible. At any rate, when my time was up, such was my experience, and so I watched the night out with Morgan.

We kept the fire burning brightly and continually swept the surrounding darkness with eyes strained to the utmost. Nothing was seen, however, though more than once some sound in the forest seemed to betray the lurking of danger.

Once, too, a faint and distant roar which we thought that of a lion, drifted through that terrible silence.

When day broke, we examined the shore again, but we discovered nothing; and, when we shoved the *Nancy Lee* out into the stream and resumed our journey, I could not banish that strange feeling of foreboding which had come to me.

Always were our eyes employed in a keen scrutiny, now of the dark and silent margin of trees on either side, now of the river ahead. Hour after hour passed; though nothing happened, we maintained an undiminished vigilance.

We ate our midday meal (consisting of some venison cooked that morning, some berries and vegetables) without landing. On and on we floated down the stream, and no sign of men met our eyes.

But the hour was drawing near.

Before the sun had marked mid-afternoon, the river swung sharply to the left and soon ran along the base of a low range of mountains. The current here was very swift, so swift, indeed, that we became uneasy. And soon we came to the largest tributary we had yet seen.

which merged its waters with the Quain fan just above a deep and evil-looking canon and which issued lazily from a big-mouthed cavern.

We ran the raft ashore at this yawning hole, which Henry afterwards named Pluto's Cave, and stood looking in.

A dull and distant roar was borne to our ears on the quiet air, and, on the slow-moving surface of the emerging water, there were little streams and eddies of foam.

And, somewhere up there in the mountain, borne along toward us on the black bosom of this hypogeal river, was "the jeweled woman."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE JEWELED WOMAN—THE FIRST MAN

AND now I come to what may prove not the strangest one by any means but the most—how shall I put it?—the most outré chapter of all.

Indeed, one phase of the matter is something of a puzzle to me to this very day.

As I have said, we ran the raft ashore just above a deep and evil-looking canon. Its walls were precipitous, and we feared that it might contain rapids. There was none so far as we could see, but this was only for several hundred yards, owing to a bend, and we had no way of knowing how long that sinister-looking canon was.

The valley here was very narrow and hemmed in on the other side by another range of mountains.

"Hope we aren't held up here by rapids," said Henry. "For, you know, I would hate like the dickens to have to abandon the *Nancy Lee*."

"So would I," nodded Morgan. "She's a good little craft, bless her, and has brought us many a long mile in safety—though, like the true feminine she is, she's darned hard to steer."

"Funny thing," mused Henry Quainfan.

"Funny thing what?" demanded St. Cloud.

"Why, here we are on an alien world, and yet here are women."

He paused and looked at us thoughtfully, then added:

"And only Heaven knows what will come to each of us through the love or hate of a woman."

In days that followed, often I had occasion to remember those words of his at Pluto's Cave.

"Well," said Morgan airily, "one thing is certain—"

He was interrupted by a curious exclamation from Henry Quainfan.

I, who had been looking down the river, swung round on the instant, to see Henry staring into the cavern.

"What is it?" asked Morgan.

Henry gave no answer. I followed his gaze and saw something floating toward us in that subterrane darkness.

A moment or two later, my eyes growing accustomed to the deep obscurity, I made out a human form on a raft.

"By Heaven," exclaimed Henry suddenly, "it's a woman!"

Even as he spoke, I saw that it was so.

And slowly the woman floated toward us out of the darkness. Soon she was in the powerful sunlight. And now a strange thing happened: that rude raft swung toward us, swung in and grounded at our very feet.

Henry and Morgan swore. I became suddenly weak and sat down. I remember noting as I did so that her hair was black, that most of it was in the water, moving slowly in the gentle current, and shivering as my eyes fell upon her breast.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Henry Quainfan in horror. "Look at that!"

I looked and shivered again. Her dripping breast was quite naked, and it was covered with great welts—horribly slashed and torn. She was dead. We cut the strips of hide that bound her to the raft and laid her on the sand. Hands and feet were bound, the hands behind her back, and upon her face, one of great beauty, was stamped a look of unutterable horror.

"God!" said Henry, shuddering. "What a hellish piece of work! And see how beautiful she is—even with that awful, unutterable horror on her face. What a fiend is this thing with the god-like intellect, the biggest monster that ever cast a shadow in the sun, and he lifts his hands in horror at blood-dripping claws and fangs! I wonder, now, why they did this."

He stretched out a hand, brushed the wet hair from her cheek, leaned over and kissed the dead woman on the forehead, and it seemed to me a proper and beautiful thing to do.

I have called her beautiful; she was, indeed, one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Her skin was olive, her hair raven, and her age I thought was about twenty-five—that is terrestrial years. Her eyes were closed—I was glad they were—and her lips slightly severed. Her dress was of skins with the hair removed, richly colored and reached just below the knee. The bodice had been torn off, though not from the skirt, so that the lash might strike the naked flesh. There were no marks beyond those welts and lacerations. Evidently she had been lashed ere tied to the raft, and I shuddered to think of her horrible end in that subterranean cavern.

But there were the jewels. I have called her the jeweled woman, and, of a truth, she was the jeweled woman. From each ear was pendant a rough diamond, of the first water and weighing, Henry thought, about eighty carats; about her neck were two strings of rubies, most of them spinel, though some were those wondrous gems that lapidaries call pigeon's-blood; and about her waist a multicolorous zone thickly studded with sapphires.

"There's a fortune there," observed St. Cloud.

Henry Quainfan looked at him quickly, and his eyes were hard.

"Is that what you see?" he asked.

The dark eyes of St. Cloud flashed, his lips parted for speech; but of a sudden he changed his mind and stood silent.

Henry drew his big hunting-knife and cut the thongs which bound her wrists and ankles. Then he covered up her breast and folded her hands. Her dress and wealth of hair now were streaming in the powerful sunlight. Henry arose and stood looking down at her face, his own a little pale, his lips slightly parted.

St. Cloud, I believe, was looking at the sapphires.

"I wish," said Henry, lifting his gaze up to the mountain through which the woman had come down to us, "that I could get a chance to speak with my Winchester to the fellows that did this."

"Maybe after all," St. Cloud said, "she deserved what she got."

Henry looked at him fixedly for a few moments, his eyes cold as steel, then turned away with something like disgust.

"What I can't understand," Morgan added, "is why they turned her adrift with all those jewels."

Neither of us made any response to this. The silence that followed had something strange about it.

"Well," said Henry at last, "let's bury her. We can dig the grave with one of the axes and with the paddles. We'll pile stones on her so the beasts can not tear asunder her bones."

> *"'Lay her i' th' earth: And from her fair and unpolluted flesh*
> *May violets spring!'"*

I felt like crying; and suddenly, from somewhere in the forest across the river, came a strong and prolonged cry of agony, then silence—heavy, awful.

"Yes, let's inter this girl," said Henry, "and get away from the cursed spot."

A short silence ensued, to be broken by Morgan.

"Are you going to bury her with all those stones on?" he asked.

What happened was a surprising thing.

Henry Quainfan turned on him fiercely, his gray eyes seeming to emit points of steel.

"Of course!" he told St. Cloud vehemently. "That is just what we are going to do: bury her with all her jewels."

"'Tis infernal foolishness!" said Morgan. "Think of it: those stones are—"

Henry broke in upon his speech like a thunderclap.

"Think of it—ghouls!" he cried.

"I tell you—" began St. Cloud.

But Henry Quainfan lashed in with curses—stinging, terrible. The words leapt from his lips. They swung and cracked like the lash of a whip. I was amazed. St. Cloud had taken a step backward in his surprise at this sudden and totally unexpected outburst, and there he stood with blazing eyes, waiting for Henry to cease.

He soon did, and then St. Cloud lashed back. They flung curses back and forth. I became uneasy. Things were looking serious. What was this madness which had entered my companions? It was as if I could hear the rustle of Tragedy's wings; and in the forest the wind whispered and birds sang.

And then the mystery of Henry Quainfan rushed upon me. He was a materialist (or, rather, he had been). He hoped for no future reward. To him there was no future existence even. After this life came death indeed—nothing. When dead, he would be nothing and dwell for all eternity in the darkness of nothing, as I so often had heard him put it.

And such a man, fearing no Heavenly judgment, one would think, easily could commit any crime which he knows would bring no retribution from man, and of such crimes there are many. Yet there he was cursing a man who would take diamonds and rubies from a dead woman; and the man whom he cursed, and who hurled his curses back, believed in Heavenly retribution, that every act done in the flesh we are to find weighed in the balances.

"This will never do," said I to myself.

And at that instant I noticed that St. Cloud's right hand had strayed to his revolver.

"I must put a stop to this crazy business."

I opened my mouth to speak, but no words left my lips: Morgan's revolver, blue and cold-looking, was glittering in the sunlight.

Henry laughed.

"Why don't you shoot?" he taunted.

But St. Cloud did not shoot. His arm fell inertly to his side, for a moment I thought the weapon was going to fall from his grasp; and he stood looking not at Henry Quainfan but at the jeweled woman.

"Here, here!" said I, at last finding speech. "This will never do! Put away that revolver, Morgan. And now shake hands, you two fools, and let all this disagreeable nonsense be forgotten."

St. Cloud slowly returned the revolver to its holster. But neither offered to take the other's hand. For my part, glad that Tragedy had departed, I said nothing more, but left it to them to settle as they saw fit.

Morgan sat down and stared across the river. Henry looked at him coldly for a while, then of a sudden turned and went out upon the raft, where he got an axe and a paddle. On stepping ashore, however, he suddenly dropped these tools and returned to get his blanket, which he laid over the dead woman.

"We'll wrap her in it," he said. "Rider, will you go down and reconnoiter the canon? Morgan and I will dig the grave. Keep your eyes open, now."

The canon I found about three-quarters of a mile in length and free of rapids. At length I ascended to a coign of vantage, whence were caught, through openings in the trees, glimpses of the river several miles away.

Suddenly there was a sound behind me, the sound of bushes being pushed asunder cautiously but swiftly.

I swung round, heard a sharp exclamation and found myself face to face with a Venusian.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

STRAIGHT TOWARD US

SURPRISE was mutual. In a flash my rifle was up, and the man (almost as white as myself and naked save for a leopard-skin about the middle) raised his spear as though to hurl it at me with all his might.

How it happened that he did not let fly—who can tell that? But he did not. The weapon remained there poised above his head, my finger caressed the trigger, and thus we stood staring at each other.

We were separated by the distance of only five or six yards. Had he made the least threatening movement, I should have fired.

I smiled. The savage did not smile back, but he hesitatingly lowered his weapon, uttering as he did so this expressive exclamation:

"*Uuk!*"

At that moment came the discovery that my Venusian was not alone. There was a faint rustling in the bushes from which he had just issued; soon the foliage was pushed asunder, and the head and shoulders of the second man were thrust into view.

Face instinct with surprise, he stared across at me.

He said something in a sharp voice, never moving his beady look for a single instant. The answer his companion gave was short—monosyllabic, in fact. In a few moments, with extreme caution (he had an arrow fitted to his bowstring) the newcomer emerged and took his stand beside the first.

He, too, was naked save for a skin about the waist. He had no spear. A quiver full of arrows was at his back, the feathered ends sticking up above his right shoulder. Each man carried a tomahawk, steel-hilted, and the first had a bow and quiver as well as that vicious-looking spear of his. His eyes were black, the other's blue; their black hair long and unkept, beards scanty. Each had a metal band encircling his left wrist, a string of claws round his neck and on his breast a bird tattooed in vivid scarlet.

It was patent that they did not know what to make of me and plain, too, I thought, that they recognized the rifle as a weapon.

They talked earnestly together for a few moments, never taking their keen eyes off me for the fraction of a second even.

Directly they ceased, I smiled once more and started to move toward them but stopped instanter when they raised their weapons with sudden menace.

Again they spoke earnestly, their language sounding soft and musical, very much like the Spanish.

Then of a sudden they half turned and began to move back, watching me as they went; a few moments, they had vanished into the foliage and I was alone once more.

When I reached the cavern, Henry and Morgan were already filling in the shallow grave.

"Any rapids, Rider?" Henry asked, leaning on his paddle, which served as a spade.

"None," I told him. "The river is pretty swift in a few places, but we can make it through all right."

"Good. You know, I was afraid of that canon."

"No, there are no rapids there, but I found—or, rather, the find found me—but guess what I saw."

"Venusians?" he asked.

I nodded, and St. Cloud gave a quick glance behind him, then this way and that into the gloom of the forest.

"Venusians," I nodded. "Two."

"Tell us about it," Henry said quickly

I did.

"So they are white, too," said Morgan.

"White as ourselves—allowing for their Venusian tan, that is."

"Well, what do you know about that!"

"Did you think to find them green?" Henry queried. "Have you forgotten our Lady of the Jewels?"

"After all what a remarkable thing," said Morgan: "these people just like ourselves!"

"That," said Henry, "to use St. Cloudian phraseology, remains to be seen."

"It won't remain long," the other returned. "Unless I'm mightily mistaken, we are in for something now."

Henry Quainfan made no response. He resumed his labor with a sobriety of demeanor that showed his thoughts suddenly had gone to other things.

The last spade of earth cast, we stood there for some moments in silence.

"We can do no more," said Henry Quainfan, "so let's get away from this cursed place. You know, the sight of that woman has affected me strangely. I do not understand. That was why I flew at Morgan so suddenly and vehemently. I am sorry, Morgan, as I told you—though not for the stand I took."

"All the same," returned St. Cloud, "it was blanked foolishness."

"The sun is getting low," I put in, for I wanted to change the subject; "we had better be on our way."

"We had," Henry nodded.

We retraced our steps to the raft forthwith. I was about to step aboard when a strong liquid song filled the air. Turning, I saw a yellow, canary-like bird singing on the grave of the jeweled woman.

"Look," I said.

They already had seen.

"She could not have a sweeter or a sadder requiem," said Henry

For a little while we stood looking.

"Well, Rider," came Henry's voice, "come aboard, and let's shove off."

A few moments, and we were gliding down the stream; a few minutes, and in the swift waters of the canon—which we ran without mishap.

Suddenly objects were involved in a curious darkness. The sky was turning black and threatening; a strong wind was springing up.

"Going to rain," I observed.

"Pour, you mean," said St. Cloud.

"And typhoon," said Henry.

At length, as twilight was creeping over the wild place, we ran the *Nancy Lee* ashore.

To our surprise, we had seen no Venusians.

"Must be very sparsely populated," said Henry, "or—"

"Look at that sky," observed Morgan. "It's going to come down in sheets. And hear the wind."

The wind was now a growling gale. The branches were tossing wildly, the boles bending before it.

"Dangerous place, this," said St. Cloud, looking up at those tossing branches. "Some of these trees are liable to be uprooted—or snapped off. Maybe we'll find one of them crashing down on us."

This was a peradventure only too obvious. But we had to take our chances: there was nothing else we could do.

We pitched the tent in what we deemed the safest spot. Just as we were adding the finishing touches, it began to rain. Rain! It did rain. Rain! It came down in streams. Hour after hour it came down in streams. The night, of inky blackness, now and again was shivered by lightning. And there we stood huddled in the tent, listening to the thunder, the rain and the roaring of the wind overhead. Now and then we heard a tree come crashing to the earth. One came down near us, shaking the ground beneath our feet.

"The river will be swollen," Henry said suddenly; "the raft will be carried away unless we draw it up farther."

"Out we go," I returned.

"Where the deuce is that rope?" said he, and I heard him groping about in the darkness. "Ah, here it is. For we'd better tie it, too."

So out we went; it was pitch black. We felt our way to the raft, drew it up and made it fast to a tree. When we again stood huddled in the tent, we were wet to the skin.

And rain! Hour after hour it came down—a veritable flood. Now and again St. Cloud would fling forth a smothered oath. Henry seldom spoke. At last, about two hours before daybreak, there was a sudden diminution in that fury of the gale; when the dark twilight came stealing over the flooded place, the rain was falling straight down, the air being absolutely motionless.

Not a single wink of sleep did any one of us get that night.

And then Venus smiled, in that sudden way she has: blue spots appeared overhead; a little while, and the rays of the sun were flashing on tree-trunk and foliage.

We remained in this spot that day and night, resuming our voyage ere it was yet full light.

We had kept a sharp lookout for Venusians, but never a vestige of one had been seen—a circumstance which called forth some little speculation on our part.

It was a beautiful day, though very hot. We all were frightfully sunburnt, none of us having been used to an extraforaneous life, as Henry saw fit to dub it. And, when noon came, not a single Venusian had been seen.

"Strange," said Henry.

"Maybe we're being watched this very moment," remarked St. Cloud, glancing into the dark depths of the forest.

"Possible," Henry nodded.

"And see that alligator thing over there," I said, "at the mouth of that slough, just gliding into the water."

This, by the way, was the first one we had seen since our issuance from the great swamp.

"And by Heaven!" exclaimed St. Cloud the next moment, "there's a Venusian!"

We looked in the direction in which he was pointing and beheld a man, about a hundred yards ahead, standing on the shore and watching us closely

"Hello, there!" hallooed Henry Quainfan, who was at the stern of the raft, dipping his paddle and swinging the bow toward the spot where the Venusian stood.

The man made no reply, gave no sign that he had heard. He just stood there and looked at us.

"There may be scores of them in the trees," said Morgan, reaching for his Winchester

When we were about a hundred feet from him, the Venusian turned suddenly, and, looking back at us over his shoulder, he glided swiftly away into the forest, and we saw him no more.

"Pleasant cuss," said Henry

About the middle of the afternoon, we came to a village, but it was deserted. It consisted of a dozen huts made of branches and long leaves, and it was evident that it had been deserted for some considerable time.

After a brief examination of the place, we returned to the *Nancy Lee* and

floated on down the stream—with Expectancy sitting at the helm, so to speak.

The sun swung lower and lower. At last he sank behind the world, and the forest gloom began to deepen about us.

Of a sudden St. Cloud exclaimed that he saw a Venusian. We looked in the direction he indicated, but neither Henry nor I saw a Venusian. However, we saw some bushes moving. Soon they were still.

The man, we were told, was disappearing when Morgan's eyes lighted upon him.

"We're in too close," said Morgan, his finger on the trigger of his rifle. "We're too near this shore."

"That's right," observed Henry as I picked up my weapon. "There may be a lot of them here, and they may attack at any instant. And we are in too close to this shore."

He placed his Winchester in a spot where he could reach it easily and quickly, then urged the craft toward the center of the stream.

Our eyes swept the wall of trees from which we slowly were drawing away, but we saw no movement of the foliage, heard not the faintest sound.

A few minutes passed. We were nearing a bend. At the moment, we all were looking ahead. Suddenly, with a swish, an arrow shot past my head and into the river with a vicious *chug*.

We swung round. The Winchester flew to my shoulder. I saw bushes moving; no Venusian, however, was to be seen.

"Don't shoot until you see him," said Henry. "Don't throw away a single bullet even. There—there he is!"

The Venusian's head and shoulders had appeared. He had another arrow fitted to the string—indeed, was in the act of drawing it to its head.

I took swift aim—but did not fire. St. Cloud saved that Venusian's life. A sharp cry burst from his lips just as I was going to press the trigger, causing my eyes to leap from the Venusian to him.

We were rounding the bend now, and St. Cloud was pointing ahead, a little wildly, looking back at us over his shoulder.

That instant my eyes fell on what had caused Morgan to cry out, the arrow from the bow of the Venusian whose life he had saved struck with a sharp rap, pinning my right trouser leg to the raft, just below the knee.

And this is what St. Cloud had seen: a big warcanoe, filled with Venusians, just come into view from behind a wall of trees, gliding out into the stream and heading straight toward us.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"LEENAM DRACONDA"

THE Venusians' paddles rose and fell swiftly and in unison. A half dozen or so of the warriors were standing, and in the fading light I noted that all of these had bows.

"Hold on, Morgan," said Henry. "Better wait a little—till they're closer."

The last word scarcely had left his lips when the air was filled with whoops and shrieks horrible beyond all words—threatening, for an instant, to arrest the coursing blood in our veins.

Came a feeble echo from that Venusian behind us.

I looked back. Henry, his eyes fixed ahead, had laid aside the paddle and taken up his Winchester. The Venusian had drawn another arrow to its head; even as my eyes struck him, the arrow left the bow, but it fell short. I raised the rifle and drew a bead on the savage, and this time it was Henry who saved that Venusian's life.

"Don't waste a bullet on him," he said. "We're out of range, I think. Keep your eyes on those fellows ahead, but don't shoot till you have to."

"There, see!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "They're going to let us have it!"

"Don't miss," said Henry Quainfan earnestly.

Then to me:

"Wait, Rider. I think one bullet will be enough."

The two foremost Venusians—the canoe was something over a hundred feet from us now—were drawing their bows. Came another burst of those horrible whoops and shrieks—cut short by the crack of Morgan's rifle.

The foremost warrior went down like a sack of lead, his right arm hanging over the side of the canoe, the fingers splashing the glancing element.

Henry had been right. The paddles became still, the Venusians like statues, apparently stupefied by this strange manner of slaying, and the wonted silence settled down again upon the darkling world.

"I thought so," said Henry.

Morgan was drawing a bead on another warrior.

"Wait," said Henry. "I think that shot did it—that we are safe from attack."

St. Cloud slowly lowered the weapon, keeping his finger on the trigger.

The Venusians were gesticulating wildly now; suddenly the paddles were dipped, and the canoe shot ahead, the bow swinging away from us.

As the canoe shot across, about thirty feet away, one of the warriors started to draw his bow. Morgan's rifle flew to his shoulder; the weapon barked, and the unfortunate Venusian, after clutching wildly at the empty air for a few seconds, fell into the water with a loud splash, his body writhing and turning and arms and legs moving spasmodically as he sank from sight.

There was, to my deep thankfulness, no further sign of hostility. The canoe described a swift arc and fled toward the place whence it had come.

We followed, and soon, on rounding the wall of trees, the ruined city met our eyes.

The canoe raced toward the shore, upon which several fires were burning, and we crawled along after it. A murmur from the watching Venusians ran along the strand. It must have amazed them, to say the least, to see their score of warriors in the big canoe fleeing so wildly from three men on a raft. The murmur was answered by a many-throated cry from warriors. There were several small canoes in the stream, and thereat they darted shoreward. Pandemonium reigned before us. The place was deserted when the big war-canoe struck the shore; the warriors leaped out, fled up the bank, and soon they, too, had vanished into the evening shadows.

"The best thing to do," said Henry Quainfan, "is to go right on, make believe that we are afraid of nothing."

When were were nearing the shore, however, St. Cloud's paddle suddenly became still.

"Keep right on," said Henry earnestly. "We've made a good impression."

"I should say we have," I said.

"So, whatever we do," Henry added, "we must not appear hesitant."

"I suppose so," said Morgan, dipping his blade. "Circumstance seems to be master here. All the same we may be going right into an ambush."

We ran the *Nancy Lee* ashore near the big canoe. Before us rose stone steps, upon which the hand of Ruin had long ago fallen. These we ascended and found ourselves before an arch in the crumbling city wall. Through it we passed, and now a broad street stretched away between ruined buildings of stone, in which lived these savage Venusians. But not a single Venusian was anywhere to be seen.

"We did make an impression!" said I.

"Phenomenal," Henry said. "But let's stroll up the boulevard. I suppose some of them will put in an appearance before long."

We had proceeded but a hundred feet, however, when he stopped suddenly

"Listen," he said.

The next moment he had disappeared cautiously through a huge doorway, from which came the flickering of firelight.

"Papoose," said Morgan.

Henry soon came with the baby in his arms. It had yellow hair and blue eyes and no more clothes than a papoose baboon.

For a space it stared at him, as if saying to itself.

"Well, who the dickens are you?"

Then it smiled through its tears and babbled something in baby talk. Babies always did like Henry.

"These poor Venusians must have got an awful scare," said Henry, "when the mother of this tot ran away and left it."

He leaned his rifle against the wall, seated himself in the doorway and began playing with the baby.

"You've certainly got a fine daddy and mama, you little son of a gun," he said. "You ought to—"

"What the deuce is on the programme now?" put in St. Cloud, looking about for Venusians.

"Wait till they come back, I suppose," returned Henry. "What else can we do?"

"Nothing, it seems," said Morgan. "But they may make an attack."

"I hardly think so."

Twilight now was deepening to darkness. A number of fires lighted up the street, one of them burning near the spot where we had halted.

At last we saw some Venusians coming down the street toward us. They came slowly, often hesitating. There were about twenty. The deputation was headed by two men, one of them an old man with a long white beard and long white hair. His attire was scanty but richly decorated, and a plethora of bone and metal ornaments decked his person. We rightly conjectured that he was a priest. As for his companion, he was middle-aged, powerfully built and evil of visage—evidently a chief as powerful in influence as he was in person.

"You're the leader," said I to Henry. "You handle this diplomatic business."

St. Cloud and I stepped back a little to show that Henry was our pendragon, as St. Cloud put it. Henry was still holding the baby. Now, this tribe, called the Oham, has a peculiar custom: Incredible though it may seem, no man in it ever touches a baby. No man would think of touching one. To the men babies are taboo. If he touches one, even if it is a matter of life and death, an Oham man's wife divorces him instanter, and he is doomed to a state of celibacy. Wherefore the Oham men do not touch babies. No Oham man touches son or daughter till he or she is full grown.

All this, by the way, we learned from Draconda.

At length the deputation came to a halt, bowing low. Then succeeded an awkward silence. Neither side, of course, could speak a word intelligible to the other. The old man said something in the tongue of the Ohams. Henry smiled in answer, then, by means of signs, endeavored to express that amity which we so cordially hoped would prevail. Whereupon the old Venusian, with pantomime, told us that the city was ours and expressed the hope that our lordships would not harm his people. Henry answered, as best he could, that nothing was farther from our thoughts. And now it was that we heard Draconda's name for the first time. After exchanging a few words with the chief* the old Venusian pointed into the northwest and said:

"*Leenam Draconda.*"

These words he repeated several times—as if their very utterance had something potent, talismanic.

Henry nodded.

"Leenam Draconda," he said loftily. Then to us.

"Wonder who—or what—this Leenam Draconda is."

"King, maybe," I returned.

"Queen, I fancy," said Morgan.

Came a halt in the proceedings, when suddenly the old Venusian spoke in a language there was no possibility of misconstruing: he opened his mouth and pointed down his throat.

Henry said we would, whereupon the old man gave a command, and one of the men (none of them, by the way, carried a weapon) saluted and sped away up the street.

"The royal poison-preparer," said St. Cloud.

Whereat Henry Quainfan laughed outright to the evident astonishment of our savage hosts.

Henry put the baby back where he had found it, and we started, the old man and the evil-visaged chief in the lead, their followers strung out behind us.

"I don't like this formation," muttered St. Cloud, looking straight before him and endeavoring to hide his apprehension. "They could rush us now."

"They could," Henry said, "but they can't."

When we had proceeded a short distance, perhaps two hundred yards, we turned to the right, entering another street. A hundred yards or so, and we halted before an imposing edifice, the home of the priest.

Here again was that Egyptian-like style of architecture, and the building was in pretty good condition. We entered and found ourselves in a large room, down which ran two rows of massive columns and in the center of which a little fire was burning lazily, flooding the great room with a lurid light and casting great shadows upon the floor, the columns and the walls.

On the floor, surrounding the fire, were a few furs and a goodly number of multicolorous mats, upon which the Venusians and ourselves took seat; a silence fell, disturbed only by the crackling of the fire.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"BLANCHE!"

My eyes ran along the walls, which were richly sculptured with war, hunting and love scenes.

And where now were the warriors, the hunters, the lovers? Where the dripping of blood and the trembling lips? Where now the men who had raised up these great buildings in some lost age of the planet, loved and taken maids to wife? The dazzling beauties who had made men's heads to swim, their laughter and their tears? Where now were the masters and the slaves, the poets and the fools, the kings and the beggars, the queens and the hetaerae? Gone, utterly gone—gone and lost forever. The glory of those men and women of old time had utterly perished, their great palaces, fallen into ruin, now the habitations of the savage Ohams.

And yet gone was not perished! That was true only of their flesh, gone to the earth whence it came: their spirits lived on even now—who knew where?

These gloomy meditations were brought to an end by Henry Quainfan—for which you'll perhaps be thankful.

"Funny thing," he said, "the architecture is Egyptian, but the sculpturing is Greek."

"Not the only thing that's Greek," put in Morgan.

"And this Leenam Draconda?" Henry added. "What will happen when we meet?"

"If we ever do!" said St. Cloud.

"Draconda! A man's name, that, or a woman's?"

"Woman's, I think," I told him.

"Sounds like it to me," said Morgan.

Henry Quainfan nodded.

"When I come to think of it, I believe it is. I'm going to find out."

"How?" I wanted to know.

"It will be easy."

*The old man, as we afterward learned, was the head chief as well as head priest.—E. F.

He came to his feet and was about to make a sign to the old Venusian when a woman entered with an armful of wood. She was about fifty years of age and unutterably ugly—the ugliest female of the species, I believe, that I have ever set eyes on.

When she had gone, Henry walked over to the nearest wall and laid his left hand on a canephore.

"Draconda?" he asked. "Leenam Draconda?"

The old priest and the chief shook their heads. The former pointed into the northwest.

"Draconda," he said. "Leenam Draconda."

Henry pointed to himself.

"Draconda?" he asked.

Then he pointed to the canephore again.

"Draconda? Leenam Draconda?"

The Venusians looked at him with bewilderment depicted on their swarthy lineaments. Then suddenly a smile of comprehension lighted up the old man's face; he nodded his white head vigorously.

"Leenam Draconda," he said, pointing to the sculptured woman. "Leenam Draconda."

He pointed to Henry and shook his head, then to the canephore and nodded, saying:

"Leenam Draconda."

Henry nodded and returned to his seat.

"Must be the queen," he said.

"It seems strange to me," I remarked, "that savages such as these are ruled by a woman."

"But perhaps there is civilization over there in the northwest," Henry returned. "Probably we are now in a mighty empire and this is merely a border people. You know, there may be—"

I followed the direction of his look, to see a young woman entering the room, bearing in each jeweled hand a steaming bowl. She was not beautiful, was not even pretty; but, as I soon saw, she possessed in an unusual degree that fascinating something possessed by so many women whom Venus has blighted.

She wore a coarsely-woven dress of vegetable fiber, reaching just below the knee. It was cut low at her jeweled, sun-browned neck; on her little feet were sandals. She was, as we afterward learned, the old priest's daughter. Also, she was beloved by that evil-visaged giant beside him.

And now comes a curious thing, a custom that, strangely enough, prevails throughout Draconda's kingdom: the prerogative of love-making belongs to the woman, never, under any circumstances, is to be exercised by mere man.

When the eyes of this maid met Henry's, I saw the blood creep up to her olive skin, and I thought a greater trembling seized her hands. Swiftly I glanced at the chief and the priest.

The old man was looking straight at the girl. His face was expressionless. But the giant's face was not so; and I did not like that look which I saw upon it. On the instant I knew that he was frightfully jealous. My eyes went back to Henry Quamfan, to find him as impassive as that column of stone behind him.

One of the bowls she placed before Henry, the other before me. It was, as we afterward learned, a great honor to be waited upon by the old priest's daughter, an honor accorded to very few—in this instance, only her father and the chief in addition to ourselves, the rest of the company being waited upon by another maiden. It was a good meal, consisting of meat, a kind of bread, vegetables and fruit.

I noted that the princess—for princess she was—glanced often at Henry, glanced in a bold yet tremulous way. I could not mistake the meaning of those glances. No one could. Her boldness gave me a curiously uncomfortable feeling. But she was doing only what any other Oham maid would have done. We were not on Terra but on Venus, in the land of the Ohams; and there the woman make love as it should be made in the land of the Ohams—and in no namby-pamby fashion do they make it, either.

At length the old Venusian (in pantomime, of course) asked us whence we had come. Henry arose and pointed to that doorway through which we had entered. We all issued. In the street stood little groups of Venusians, like troubled sprites.

Above the great cordillera, there in the east, blazed our wondrous earth with its attendant star. Henry pointed to it—explained to them that we had come from that world in the sky.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes wide.

The old man, however, the light of the torch flickering on his swarthy features, nodded as if he had expected something like that.

Again he pointed into the northwest.

"Leenam Draconda," he said.

Our eyes came back to that glorious star in the east, strange emotions—poignant, now tender—hovering about us as we gazed.

There were very few clouds this night, the heavens arching over us in all their cosmic mystery and beauty.

Though a great mass of water vapor is held in suspension, the condition of the Venusian atmosphere, by the way is not at all like that which is believed to exist by Terra's astronomers.

Terrestrial observers believe that the planet is hidden by dense masses of the vapor of water, so vapor-wrapped that it is virtually impossible to see any markings on the globe. When it comes to the determinations of the planet's albedo, however, one finds a discrepancy that accords very ill with the boasted precision of science, but it is usually given as about that of cloud or fresh-fallen snow. The great brilliancy of the planet, therefore, proves it to be surrounded by dense cloud-masses. So the Venusians (if there are any) have a sky in which there are seldom any openings, nights of appalling blackness and a difficult time making astronomical observations. Perhaps, indeed, there never are any openings through which the inhabitants can view the stars; perhaps the faint markings seen on the Venusian disk are shadows cast upon lower cloud-strata.

Of course, all observers are not in concordance when it comes to this—for instance, Lowell found the disk of Venus cloudless—but there is no doubt that our astronomers can make but very unsatisfactory observations tending to throw light upon the physical habitudes of this most beautiful planet, that they can see no markings worthy of very serious consideration save the indisputable indentation in the southern horn, made, it is believed, by great mountains or by clouds forced to a high altitude by the striking of wind against a mountain chain. But this, of course, is not because of a dense cloud-envelope. Why it is that terrestrial observers can not see the surface of Venus, I do not know. As yet it is a mystery that, it is not too much to say, baffles hypothesis even.

To return:

We reentered the place and took seat again. Whenever we spoke, the Venusians were as silent, as attentive, as though oracles fell from our lips.

Now and again I heard the name of Draconda spoken, and, at such times, I thought that something very like fear came into the girl's eyes.

The night wore along. That scene often comes to me—the dark forms of the Venusians on either hand, the playing of the firelight on the grim, earnest faces, the huge shadows, as the flames flickered or leaped, quivering or swaying on the columns and walls.

At length our desire for repose was indicated, whereupon the old Venusian arose and, bearing an earthen lamp, con-

ducted us to our sleeping-chamber, a place about twenty feet wide and twenty-five in length. It had one window, over which a mat curtain was hung, gently swaying in the night breeze, as though touched by the hands of hovering spirits.

"A strange business," I observed as the footfall of our host died away on the ear, "strange from beginning to end."

"Keep in the present, Rider," St. Cloud said: "the future is as dark as the visage of that chief—and the end of this business is there."

"One thing," said Henry: "we must keep a sharp lookout this night. Though we seem to have tumbled into clover, there may be treachery afoot."

"Just what I was going to say," Morgan told him. "I have an idea, though, that no harm will come to you if that young lady can prevent it."

Henry frowned, he stood silent.

"I'll keep first watch," I volunteered.

"And I the second," said Henry.

He sat down and stared at a love scene on the wall.

"Make X-rays of your oculi, Rider," admonished St. Cloud as he disposed himself for slumber. "No telling what those gentlemen have planned. I wouldn't put anything past that confounded chief."

A silence fell, to be broken suddenly by Morgan.

"Wonder if I'll ever get to sleep!" he exclaimed. "Every time I shut my eyes, I see that fellow going down, the poor devil, and the one with his arm hanging over the side of the canoe. What did they attack us like that for? Not a nice thing, I tell you, to kill a man! But—I suppose you'll soon know what it is like."

It was some time ere he fell asleep. Suddenly he began to mutter in fearful tones, tossing himself about as though struggling to escape some terrifying thing in his dreams.

"The killing haunts his sleep," said Henry.

But St. Cloud was not dreaming of that.

"Blanche! Blanche!"

The words broke from his lips in tones tense with horror.

And it is a fact that, for an instant I thought some hidden presence there in the room flung the name back at the sleeper in savage mockery. But that, of course, was only the echo.

There he was sleeping in this ruined city, and his dreams took him back across that awful intermundane abyss to some lost or forsaken terrestrial maid—to whom I did not know. I had never heard of Blanche, and little did I dream—but that will be set down in its proper place.

The name Blanche was not heard again.

For some time Henry sat there in silence, staring at the wall with eyes that I knew did not see.

"If you're going to hold the second watch," I told him at last, "you'd better be pounding your ear."

"Quite so," he returned.

He looked at me with a curious expression in his eyes.

"By the way, Rider," he began, "that girl—"

I waited, but he did not finish—lay down without saying anything more and soon was fast asleep.

And I fell to pondering on the strangeness of love as I sat there, the Winchester across my knees, senses on the alert—wondering what this girl's love would bring to her and to us.

As Haggard's Nyleptha says, "Passion is like the lightning, it is beautiful, and it links the earth to heaven; but, alas, it blinds!"

Also, alas, it links the earth to hell.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CYNOCENE

MINUTE after minute passed, bringing no sign or sound of treachery. The soft whispering of the breeze stole into the room; once or twice the distant, mournful howl of a dog or wolf was borne to the ear; but, otherwise, a profound silence brooded over this place of ruin and darkness, a silence deep as though never broken by the footfall of man or beast.

At the expiration of the appointed time, I awoke Henry.

"A quiet watch, Rider?" he asked.

"It may be nothing but fancy," I told him, "but it seems too quiet."

"How so?"

"I can't say; but the place is as silent as a tomb."

"In a way it is. And, indeed, what isn't a tomb? Life feeds on Death hideous, isn't it, when you think of it that way?"

"I don't," I told him.

"Sleep, Rider," he said; "sleep. The time is not ours to choose, so make the best of it."

"That lamp," I observed, "will soon burn itself out. Did that old potentate figure on that?"

"It won't matter," he returned lightly. "I've got the flash-light, you know. Sweet dreams, Rider."

As doubtless has been noticed, Henry Quainfan was at times, and sometimes in the most unlikely times, confounded absent-minded; but (lest doubts be entertained as to his watchfulness) it should be remarked that he was a veritable argus when the occasion demanded.

As for my dreams, they were anything but sweet. First came that war canoe driving across the waters, and struggles and horrors that I thought never would end. Then the dark face of that chief appeared, malignant and gibbering, and blood and torture our portion. Horror succeeded horror, until at last I stood in the presence of Dracondа herself, when suddenly a cowled thing stalked out of those deep shadows behind her—the sight of it flinging me into shuddering consciousness.

The light of morning was in the place.

"Just going to wake you, Rider," came Henry's voice. "Word was brought a minute ago that breakfast only awaits our presence."

"See a ghost?" St. Cloud smiled at me.

I shivered, in spite of myself.

"I hope it was that," I told him.

It was about three hours before midday when we set out to see the city. In addition to ourselves, there were six persons in our little party. They were: Fagnam, the old priest, who was the head chief also, indeed king; that giant of the evil visage, Molimnos; the girl whose name was Cynocene; and three others—the last men of no mean importance in the Oham councils but to play no part in what I am to tell.

The city had been surrounded by a strong and lofty wall, now a crumbled ruin, though places were seen which had well withstood the assaults of the ages. Most of the buildings were in ruins, but some, thanks to their Egyptian-like massiveness, were in really excellent condition.

Through this scene of battered grandeur, flowed a small, swift river, the waters of which in past centuries had been confined between embankments of stone. In one place, indeed, it still flowed there; but, smashing its way through this feeble barrier raised by man, it had long ago chosen a course of its own, strewing the place with destruction and ruin.

Undermined by its waters, two-thirds of it fallen, we found what undoubtedly had been the grandest edifice of all—a temple. In this melancholy ruin, were found several fine statues and some wonderful sculptures in basso and alto-rilievo.

We ate our lunch by the stream, under the shade of some noble trees. After a little rest, we resumed our exploration.

An hour passed, another, and then it was that we entered that room in which I was destined to spill the blood of man for the first time—a massive, gloomy thing, utterly unlike anything we had seen.

Entering, we found ourselves in a long, narrow room, down the center of which ran a row of twenty square pillars. There were few windows in the place; the walls bore no decoration of any kind.

At the farther end of this room, was a doorway, small and dark. Pointing toward this, old Fagnam started on. He was followed by Morgan; the rest of us were strung out behind.

I glanced back, to see Cynocene slip her right hand into Henry's left. It was patent that the girl was agitated not a little; indeed, none of the Venusians seemed to be enjoying himself. I saw Henry's hand close hesitatingly over hers, and what I saw on the face of the chief—well, it caused me to drop back a step or two, so that I might keep an eye on the fellow.

"Now for the chamber of mystery," said Henry.

And his voice sounded strange, ghostly in that gloomy place.

"Lucifer's sanctum," muttered St. Cloud.

"The old priest," I observed, "is the only one that appears unperturbed. Cynocene is trembling."

At the sound of her name, Cynocene looked at me quickly.

"She's frightened not a little," I said.

Henry looked at her smiling, and she looked up at him with eyes, soft and clinging, that made something rise up in my throat and a wave of pity surge over me.

That dark doorway I have mentioned was low, so low, indeed, that the old priest had to stoop to enter.

"Funny thing, that," said Henry Quainfan.

Morgan, at the doorway, stopped and looked back at us.

"Now what on earth is in there?" he said.

"Go on," Henry returned. "and you'll get the answer."

Old Fagnam had turned and was motioning for Morgan to follow.

"Infernally dark in here," muttered St. Cloud as he stooped to enter.

For a second or two there was silence, when his voice came reverberating from the chamber in awful tones.

"Great heavens!" he cried out. "Look at that!"

"What is it?" I asked.

No answer came.

"Go on, Rider!" said Henry, giving me a shove.

And in I went—because I couldn't do anything else. Henry and Cynocene were at my heels; I could hear the others following.

As I stooped to go through that thick doorway, the thought occurred to me:

"Have they brought us here to make an end of us? Why didn't Morgan answer?"

And, as I went through, I shifted the Winchester to my left hand and my right closed on the butt of the Colt's.

But Morgan was safe. He was standing right in front of me. That was why I didn't see it. The priest had vanished.

"Look!" cried Morgan, stepping to one side. "Look there!"

I looked. At that moment Henry and the girl stepped to my side. There before us, about twenty-five feet away, dimly seen in the light that struggled in through a tiny window on either side, was a face grinning at us—a face, it seemed, suspended in the empty air—huge, horrible, quasi-human, white and stamped with an expression of unutterable cruelty and fiendish mockery. The thing made me shiver from head to foot. The girl gave a sharp cry and flung her arms around Henry's neck, looking back over her shoulder at that thing which grinned. Came a muttering from the floor, discovering the whereness of old Fagnam. There the old boy was, flat on his stomach. Down went the others, all save Cynocene, and she too would have prostrated herself before that thing of horror if Henry had not stopped her.

"Doré or Poe never visioned a thing like that," said Henry. "Did you ever see such cruelty and mockery?"

In a little while, our eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, we could make out, thought indistinctly, the body of the statue.

"Let's go up," said Henry, "and get a good look."

At this proposal the girl manifested surprise and alarm, endeavored to dissuade us from it. Seeing, however, that her deportation would be futile, she suddenly announced (with signs, of course) that she would go back and await our return in the other room.

Accordingly Cynocene left the place, and we stepped forward, to the manifest horror of the Venusians, who perhaps expected to see us blasted for this sacrilegious proceeding.

The body, naked above the waist, was that of a woman; in her hands, which rested on the right knee, she held a *real* human skull. With only the head visible, suspended, as it were, in the empty air, the sight had been an uncanny one; but, now that all was visible, it was simply a very horrible thing in stone.

I happened to glance back at the doorway; there I saw a dark form, which vanished suddenly.

I thought of Molimnos and Cynocene. So imperfect had been that glimpse, however, that I could not tell whether it was the chief or not.

I thought it well to make sure.

"One of the Venusians just went out," I told Henry as I started back. "I think it was Molimnos."

We retraced our steps swiftly, myself in the lead. Just as we were passing those prostrate Venusians, came a shriek, sudden, piercing, horrible.

One leap took me into the doorway.

About halfway down the room, were the chief and Cynocene. The girl was on her knees, one hand on the floor, the other in his iron grip, her eyes, wide with horror, fixed on the knife raised high above the giant's head. A stream of sunshine flowed in upon them, lighting up the chief from the elbow of his uprised arm to his waist and lighting up Cynocene's whole person. There were faint shadows on her upturned face. Her lips were parted, but voiceless as the lips of the dead.

I threw the rifle to my shoulder and fired. If I had been a second longer, or Chance had not directed the bullet to his heart—for my aim, I fear, had little enough to do with it—that blade would have been buried in Cynocene's heaving breast. The report thundered round the rocky walls, and, spinning round twice, Molimnos crashed down dead.

We rushed to the girl and found her unhurt.

But I have often thought that it would have been a kind stroke of Fate had the love-mad Molimnos plunged his weapon into Cynocene's heart, for then would not have occurred that terrible thing it is now my task to relate.

The third day after this terrible business in the temple of gloom was the one decided upon for our departure.

The first part of our journey to Draconda, old Fagnam had explained, would be by canoe. It would take two days to reach that point down the river whence the road ran away to Loom, the name of the city where Draconda lived, and he himself was going to accompany us that far. That second part of our journey, considerably the longer, would be by horse.

On this day in question, we were up with the dawn. As soon as I saw her, I knew that Cynocene had had a bad night of it. I wished heartily that we were gone.

Our breakfast that morning was a gloomy affair. At last came that time I so welcomed and yet dreaded so much—

the time for departure. Then, however, to my surprise, we learned that Cynocene was not going down to the shore to see us off.

St. Cloud and I pressed her hand in farewell and started; but scarcely a half dozen steps had been taken when a low, sudden cry brought us to a stop and turned us round in our tracks.

Cynocene had flung her arms round Henry's neck and was weeping in a way that was simply terrible. He put his arms about the girl and held her close, and she pressed her cheek against his—beginning to weep more terribly than ever in that embrace in which she knew there was no love.

Of a sudden Henry tore himself free and started away; the next instant the girl drew a hidden dagger, raised it high above her breast and struck.

With a wild cry, Henry sprang to her side and caught her in his arms. He knelt down on the stone floor, holding her head gently against his shoulder

A single look showed that the girl could not live, that death might come at any moment. Old Fagnam was beside himself with grief. Cynocene raised her arms and tried to put them around Henry's neck, but her strength was ebbing away too swiftly. Then she raised her face for him to kiss her. He bent his head, kissed her on the lips; the next moment she gave a painful sigh, her head sank forward, and Henry Quatrefan held a corpse in his arms.

He came to his feet, his eyes swimming in tears.

"Take me away, Rider," he said weakly, reeling like a drunken man. "Take me away."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE SACRIFICE

THE words spoken by Henry Quatrefan in the concluding sentences of the preceding chapter convey a far better idea of the effect upon him than possible by any I could set down; so I shall hasten on.

We did not go forth on our journey to Draconda that day, nor the next or the one following that, for we stayed for the poor girl's funeral—the interment being on the last day mentioned, as is the Oham custom.

On this day, some two hours after the sun had passed the meridian, about four score persons, of both sexes, and of evident rank, as rank goes in this barbaric place, came gliding into that great room in which we had first seen Cynocene—in the gloom of which she now lay a corpse. Silent as shadows they came (indeed, almost as silently) and took seat on the flagging, from which every covering had been removed save that rug of fur on which Cynocene herself lay. Beside her sat old Fagnam, not an ornament of any kind on his person now, silent, moveless, his gray locks shorn.

The old man's gaze seemed fixed in vacancy itself. There was not the slightest change in it, not a lineament moved, while the people were entering.

Came a long, painful silence. Once to our ears drifted the far howl of a dog.

Then one of the priests arose and began to speak. For many minutes his low voice was heard, echoing mournfully from the rocky walls. At last he stood silent, then suddenly started a song, low, wailing, a thing terrible to hear. The others joined in, men and women, everyone save old Fagnam, and for many minutes that awful spondeum rose and fell on the cold ears of the dead.

The song was followed by a silence which lasted for several minutes, when the bereaved old man stood up and began to speak. Once we knew that he was speaking of ourselves—or perhaps of Henry only, for it was upon him that all eyes were suddenly turned. In the stillness that succeeded, two priests arose and, after Fagnam had taken the last, lingering look at his daughter, concealed the face of Cynocene forever from mortal eyes.

The bier on which she lay was now lifted up by young women, who walked slowly from the place with measured tread. Behind them moved Fagnam, his white head bowed. As the old man was passing us, the priest who had spoken requested, with signs, that we step in beside him, which we did.

The street was crowded. Every Oham, I believe, was there. Down the lane formed by the hundred of savages, we walked, the people falling in behind us. There was no sound of voices. Could be heard only the low sound of those hundreds of feet on the stones.

In something like twenty minutes, we reached the grave, near a flower-burdened tree. Here Cynocene was laid on a bed of white roses. Four priests now stepped forward and wrapped the body in tough bark, when it was lowered into the earth amidst an utter silence. Then eight maidens, four on either side of the grave, moved to the edge and covered Cynocene with flowers.

As they stepped back, the officiating priest took up a handful of earth and, uttering a few words in tones deep and solemn, let it fall from his fingers into the grave. Then a low sound, something like the wail of weary waves on the beach, crept through the still air. Slowly it increased in volume, slowly died away, and this dirge was sung by the women only. As it fell on the ear, a half dozen men began filling in the grave. I saw tears trickling down old Fagnam's cheeks; and this bereaved old barbarian and the man from another world who stood the innocent cause of his bereavement stood side by side and watched.

The next day we bade good-bye to the Ohams and the *Nancy Lee*, just as the great sun was rising above the cordillera, starting on our journey to Draconda in that very war-canoe in which the score of Vonasana had set out to attack us.

Old Fagnam, sorrowful and silent, commanded the party. It rained all that afternoon but not heavily. For two days we journed down the river, passing through a country very sparsely populated, and some ruins that I wish I could stop to describe; and, just as the sun was setting, going down in a blood-dripping sky, we came to another ruined city, more interesting even than the first. This place of ruin is about three times as large as that in which dwell the Ohams and is inhabited by about five thousand savages—or, strictly, barbarians—who are called Cumnoes. Its ruins, many and colossal, were found very interesting, but I shall not pause to describe even the most wonderful.

The next morning, early, at the first blush of twilight, a courier mounted on a horse left to bear for the first stage of its journey the message that would give Queen Draconda intelligence of the arrival in her kingdom of "the men from the stars."

The day following, we said good-bye to old Fagnam, who had fallen ill, though not seriously, and, with the *kemnoe*, or chief of the Cumnoes, and an escort of fifty warriors, we set out for Loom, which we were told was about ten days distant. I have often thought of old Fagnam, and I wonder if he has yet gone to meet his Cynocene and them who went before her, for he was full of years.*

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*Since the above was written, old Fagnam has been killed. The Ohams, who live on the frontier were attacked early one morning by a Wilson Lancers or group the invaded woman was a Wilson and for several hours the battle raged furiously and the issue was doubtful. The surprise was not complete, but, before they could rally, many Ohams were slain. The Wilsons, though greatly outnumbering the attacked, were finally repulsed, but not before they had slain half or more of the Oham warriors.

Among those was old Fagnam, who directed his warriors almost to the last, old man though he was. The head priest of the Ohams, though not his subordinate of the ecclesiastical order, could be a warrior as well as a priest, and all the chiefs are subject to his mandates. Through the cowardice of some of his warriors or through a misunderstanding—most likely it was the latter. Fagnam was cut off with only half a dozen followers, and the grim old priest and warrior fought gallantly, swinging his solid war-club, until he was brained from behind.

Two men conquered fighting when he went down. Then passed old Fagnam. About two scores of Oham women were carried away captives by the defeated Wilsons, few enough as we were then and about the same number of children. It was a dark day for the Ohams. Even as I write this, an army of Ohams and Cumnoes is preparing to march into and if possible subdue the land of the hated Wilsons.—E. P.

We were mounted on wiry little horses and followed what remained of an ancient road, running close to an affluent of the Quainfan—and through a forest so dense that we did not see a ray of sunshine all that day, weirdly silent, too, save for the occasional cries of parrot-like birds. Several imposing ruins were passed, almost hidden by clinging forest growth. On stopping before one of these, there came to my mind these words of the prophet Jeremiah:

"I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down."

About an hour before the falling of darkness, we entered a large town, composed of strong huts and inhabited by a people a little farther advanced than the Ohanas or the Cumnees. We were now at the foot of a jagged mountain range, and the next morning we began the ascent of its airy defiles, but this range is a dwarf compared with that great wall in the east. On the succeeding day, when the shades of evening came down on the world, we were shivering in a wind-swept pass, wherein we spent one of the most miserable nights I have ever known.

The descent, begun about the middle of the afternoon and ended near midday of the day following, was very difficult and left us, we judged, five or six thousand feet higher than the valley of the Quainfan.

We now found ourselves in a thickly-populated region, our eyes greeted by signs of civilization, a rude civilization, it is true, but one which was good to look upon nevertheless.

About two hours before sundown, we rode into a beautiful little city, a modern one, and here the next day we said good-bye to our Cumnee friends.

We journeyed on steadily, with a new escort, following the aforementioned road, the ruins of which had threaded the dizzy defiles of the jagged range behind us and which was here, well taken care of, one of the finest highways I have ever seen; and everywhere were vestiges, mournful and eloquent, of that great civilization which had reigned over this land in some far time, in some age deep in the shadows of departed days.

We found the climate delightful and the civilization, as we advanced steadily into the northwest, gradually becoming of a higher order and consequently more pleasing.

Word of our arrival had spread with the swiftness of the wind, giving us the most fantastic characters; and, at our approach to a city, the whole population turned out to look with awe upon the men from the stars, who "slew with thunder."

The intelligence that we slew with thunder gave Draconda much concern. She did not believe that we had come from the Blue Star but that we were the harbingers of some mighty Venusian people. She knew from this thunder story that we possessed firearms, and so the queen greatly feared for the safety of her kingdom—or, strictly, empire—fearing that after us would come armies of conquest, before the onset of which her warriors with their swords, bows and spears would be destroyed incontinently, that even now she could feel her throne trembling, that in the near future it would be hurled into the dust.

But she sent forth word that every honor be accorded these mysterious strangers, sent an envoy to meet us and awaited our coming into her presence with impatience and foreboding. The reader can easily imagine how troubled, how filled with fear even, was the mind of the queen, upon whose horizon our coming had massed great storm-clouds that might send sudden and frightful destruction down upon her nation.

It was about two hours after nightfall, and soon after passing some great ruins over in the southwest black against the serene starlit sky, when we rode into the city of Poloon. There we met the queen's embassy, headed by a very handsome (and, as we subsequently learned, very powerful) young lord named Ta Anton, which means The Wolf—a man who will play an important part in what follows.

Also, as will be seen forthwith, we met this night, in a most remarkable manner, another person destined to play an important role in the awful drama, a woman—Mynine. And, as it soon proved, evil was that hour in which we set eyes on her.

The queen had given word, as has been said, that every honor be accorded us—and The Wolf, who had been awaiting our arrival, accorded us an honor by conducting us to that terrible place of meeting.

The city of Poloon we found almost deserted, a circumstance for which we were at a loss to account. However, it soon was made clear. The people had gone to the great temple of Teenamtos, where was to be offered that night the horrible sacrifice of two beautiful virgins. This sacrifice (Teenamtos is the god of fecundity) has taken place every seven years for centuries. To this terrible place we rode forthwith, conducted by The Wolf, who was accompanied by a number of men of inferior, though evidently very high, rank.

The temple, which is a colossal mass and the work of that vanished people, rather plain but replete with frowning majesty, and in excellent condition, is about a mile from the city and stands alone.

A great multitude of kneeling men, women and children ringed the temple around: there must have been thirty thousand souls there. At the edge of the crowd, and before the temple, we dismounted, then proceeded to that great flight of steps which led up to the place of sacrifice—where a lurid fire was burning, where were seated the persons of the highest rank and whither we were being conducted by The Wolf.

Now, we had reached the very foot of those steps without having discovered what was taking place up there by that lurid fire. Of course, it was obvious that this vast assemblage was a religious one, but it had not entered our heads that we might be approaching the temple of an anthropophagous god.

I was lifting one of my feet up to the first step when a horrible shriek drove through the air. Then was falling the moment of the first sacrifice to Teenamtos. That awful shriek was succeeded by an exclamation of horror from the lips of Henry Quainfan, and I, on looking up, saw a purple-robed, white-bearded man, in the full light of that lurid fire, drive a long knife into the left side of a woman, who had been stripped naked and placed upon a raised stone slab, where she was held down by four men, likewise dressed in purple.

This sudden horror made my vision to become blurry; but, through the blur, I saw another woman, a little to one side and farther away, *in puris naturalibus*, the second victim for the sacrifice, whose slender white body was wilting in the arms of the two men, young and robed in purple, that supported her

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MYNINE

FROM above instantly arose a diabolical chant, in which that kneeling multitude on the ground joined and which rushed up and smote the star-studded sky. It was as if the voices of so many devils filled the air.

We looked at one another, but no words left our lips. We were struck speechless. There we stood, as if chained to the spot, until the slain woman was removed from the slab and the two men who held the second sacrificial victim began dragging her toward the sacred stone.

I looked at Henry, whose face was ghastly pale in the lurid light, his lips

slightly parted. On his handsome face was stamped the most awful look of horror. He was staring at the scene above (The Wolf, who had ascended a half dozen steps or so, was looking back curiously and interrogatively) and suddenly, with an exclamation, he threw the Winchester to his shoulder.

"You pay for that, you old devil!" he muttered.

As the fatal weapon settled into aim, the people near us ceased to chant, and a murmur of surprise and awe welled up. Those above, apparently, had not noticed us, that which was taking place up there engrossing their attention. The old man who had slain the woman was standing with his back to us, his head turned to one side, looking at the victim that was being dragged toward his dripping knife.

"Don't man!" I told Henry.

"I won't!" he muttered.

The sharp report rang out, and the old priest dropped. He would never make another sacrificial kill. The chanting above and the chanting and murmur by us ceased on the instant. A heavy silence fell upon the temple and the surrounding multitude, disturbed only by the crackling of the ghostly fires and that movement of surprise which agitated the kneeling people.

"Come on!" cried Henry, starting up the steps.

I sprang after him. As I started, St. Cloud's Winchester barked, and one of those men that were holding the girl went down a corpse.

A murmur swept over the crowd and waxed and waned. Up the great flight of steps sprang we three Terrestrials. Soon above and below us pandemonium broke out. Those who had been officiating at the immolation turned and fled, all save one. He was a stalwart, middle-aged man, and he stood up there staring at us in a state of seeming stupefaction until Henry was nearly to the top, when the man suddenly seemed possessed of a paroxysm of maddening rage: his right arm shot back, and, lips drawn in a wolfish snarl, facial muscles twitching horribly, he hurled a big knife with terrific force straight at Henry's head.

The weapon just missed its mark, went flashing on through the air and buried itself, as we afterwards learned, to the hilt in the breast of a woman below.

The next instant I, who had halted at the first sign of hostility, pressed the trigger, and the priest pitched forward and came rolling down the steps to Henry Quainfan's feet. His right arm was under his body, the fingers of the left hand twitching as his spirit ebbed away.

A few leaps more took Henry to the top; a moment, and I was beside him.

The place we found tenanted only by the dead woman and the second virgin, whose life our timely and (as we were to learn) evil arrival had saved from the consuming flames of sacrifice.

The girl, golden-haired and strikingly beautiful, had sunk down on the floor and was looking at us with fear-filled eyes—they were blue eyes—in which tiny waves of hope surged and broke.

Henry took up a garment—perhaps her own, perhaps the dead virgin's there—and threw it over the maiden, who raised herself into a sitting position and began to draw its white folds about her.

Before us was the great entrance, through which had fled the priests, their attendants and even some of the spectators. On either side sat those privileged ones, in seats running in rows, as in an amphitheater, and they stared at us beings from another world—us men from the stars, who slew with such crushing mystery—with fearful eyes.

A heavy silence had fallen on the spot, and it seemed to my heated imagination that the stillness was replete with portentousness, that, in the dark of unborn minutes, soon to fall upon this cursed place, moved and stirred struggle and blood and destruction.

"No danger in sight," observed Henry, glancing keenly this way and that.

"Not yet," I said. "Not in sight but maybe in darkness."

"Yes," said Morgan. "Only Heaven knows what is going on in there."

As he spoke, he made a motion with his rifle toward the great entrance. Henry and I looked, but nothing was to be seen there, no sound issued from out that cavernous darkness.

"Bet we are in for it now," St. Cloud added, his eyes sweeping over that great crowd below. "I have a presentiment that we shall never leave this place alive."

He shuddered the next moment as his eyes fell on the immolated maiden, her naked body white as a sheet on that dark floor of stone.

"What a piece of work is man!" he muttered.

Taking his eyes from the awful sight, Henry Quainfan looked into mine for a moment ere he opened his mouth to speak; but he did not speak, suddenly turning away and shaking his head bitterly, railing perhaps at that mystery of Providence which had permitted this thing of horror.

His look went to the young woman whose life we had saved. She was still there on the floor. Save for a few glances at St. Cloud and me, by the way, she had kept her look riveted on Henry.

St. Cloud made an exclamation. Turning, I saw that he too was looking at the girl.

"Venus herself!" said Morgan.

I turned quickly, for I thought a faint, murmurous sound had come from that yawning entrance behind us. However, nothing was to be seen or heard. Thinking that my fevered organs of hearing had deceived me, I brought my look back to the place of sacrifice.

"What a trap we're in!" St. Cloud exclaimed.

"Trap's the word," returned Henry.

It was indeed.

He picked up a sheet, like silk, stepped to the dead woman and covered up the still form.

"Damnable!" he muttered. "Why didn't we arrive a few minutes sooner? Why didn't we notice what was going on up here?"

"What's happened is bad enough, but I fancy what's coming is worse," returned St. Cloud, looking down at the multitude, over which was sweeping a great excitement. "It looks like those fellows down there mean business."

"It does," said Henry.

"We didn't save this girl's life, after all," Morgan said.

"I know what you mean," I told him.

"Only from the knife of this old devil," and he kicked the white-bearded dead man, whose blade had been plunged to the victim's heart: "they'll get her yet and us man from the stars into the bargain."

"These gentlemen up here," I remarked, "don't look dangerous. Not a one of them seems to be armed."

"Darn poor consolation, that," muttered St. Cloud. "These boys here don't know what to do. The way they just stare! Damn 'em, I half wish they would try something! Now, why did that infernal fool bring us to this place?"

Henry Quainfan laughed.

"Go ask him, Morgan."

St. Cloud was peering down the steps.

"Like bees!" he muttered. "Bees!"

He turned his dark look to us.

"Their god is going to have a bigger sacrifice this night than they dreamed."

"Seems so," nodded Henry. "The first move is theirs, though, not ours. And as for this girl, she'll never be thrown on that slab; if death proves inevitable, I will shoot her."

He threw the barrel of his rifle into the hollow of his left arm and stood musing in silence, the while the girl gazed up at him and my eyes roved quickly on every hand.

"See down there!" exclaimed St. Cloud at last, pointing. "There's a fellow making an harangue."

"Yes," said I, "I've been watching him."

Henry's eyes slowly turned in the direction in which St. Cloud was pointing and rested vacuously on the Venusian, who was addressing the crowd in a loud voice.

"Urging them to attack," said Morgan. "One of those purple-robed devils, most likely. If they come, we shall be destroyed. They will attack from both the front and the rear—unless they are fools."

"Of course," I said.

"And don't stand there, Henry," Morgan broke out, "as though dreaming love dreams! We've got to get busy. We must sell our lives dearly. A few minutes, and we shall be even as she is."

He glanced at the dead woman.

"But they may not attack us," Henry returned, "though—"

"Look down there and see!" St. Cloud interrupted.

"It does look mighty like it. If they do—well, there'll be more than one weeping mother, widow and sweetheart when the morning's sun swings up. Many an unsung wanderer of our mighty race has gone down fighting in a far land—but none in a land so far as this! And we too shall be unsung. But listen to that fellow. His voice—"

He was interrupted by a yell from below.

"That's the forerunner of an attack," he went on, surveying the wild scene below with calm eyes. "It belongs to brute language, and we understand that language even as our savage progenitors of the Pleistocene understood."

Came another yell, louder than the first, and the Venusians near us gazed down whence it came.

"Yell, you hell-hounds!" muttered St. Cloud, throwing his rifle forward. "Yell, you sons of Satan, you spawn of Ahriman! That gentleman is speaking his last spoke."

On finishing this outburst, Morgan dropped on one knee, and his rifle settled into aim. The girl shrank back a little, and the eyes of every man and woman on either side of the place of sacrifice were fixed upon him. The doomed Venusian stood a little above his fellows and in the flare of several torches, which cast a little circle of light over the crowd that ringed him around. The rifle barked, and the man, turning half round, fell forward and disappeared. We saw another Venusian, who was standing just beyond him in a direct line with the Winchester, throw up his hands and pitch forward.

A silence rushed down, soon broken by a yell as wild and horrible as religious fervor and hatred for the beings who had desecrated the holy temple of Teemantos could make it. A great commotion began below. Everywhere were dark figures hurrying. It seemed that the utmost confusion prevailed, but there was order down there, for soon a bunch of armed men was standing at the foot of the steps; and the sight made my heart sink.

Henry looked at St. Cloud, and a smile was hovering round his lips.

"Now you've done it!" he said.

St. Cloud made an exclamation and began to look about him anxiously.

"We've got to get into a better place than this!" he exclaimed suddenly. "See! They're getting ready to charge us now!"

Henry turned quickly and stepped to the girl. She was trembling violently, her wondrous eyes swimming in tears. In a moment he had assisted her to her feet; supporting the lovely creature with his left arm, he turned and looked at the crowd below, which had become silent. But the silence which had fallen upon it was the silence that presages a storm.

"Our only choice," said Henry, "is one of those raised places at the head of the steps. I propose we take the one on our left."

"Good!" I told him. "They're both alike, save this on the left is the nearer and let's make it snappy!"

"Ditto!" said Morgan. "Great place, though, to put up a fight! One thing: if they rush us, they may hit their friends here behind."

Henry was already moving toward this place of vantage, half carrying the maiden—whose name was Mynine. And, under the light of subsequent events, terrible and bloody, it will be seen how sadly Destiny blundered in not delaying our arrival at this place of sacrifice—how horrible this thing which had stayed the immolation of Mynine.

But this seems to be a way Destiny has. How often I have wished we had been a few moments later in reaching that cursed temple of Teemantos—God only knows how many times I have wished that!

But then, as we moved swiftly toward that chosen place, the events to spring from this lovely woman's dark soul were unknown to me—as (I believe) the events of the future usually are.

Henry lifted the girl to the ledge, the next instant was beside her. It was a place about six feet higher than the floor, perhaps twenty long but only six in width, flanking those seats where the worshipers sat, which was very fine; but a circumstance not so fine was that drop in front, sheer to the ground—a distance of perhaps fifty feet. A steeple-jack, of course, would have thought nothing of it, but all the same it was a spot with some unpleasant possibilities—its obvious advantages, though, precluding even a moment's hesitation.

St. Cloud was the second man up. Almost instantaneously, as I was catching a grip on the stone to follow, his cry rang out:

"Here they come!"

It was followed, almost accompanied, by the crack of his rifle, and up to the cloud-flecked, starlit sky rose a wild and lingering yell—from the throat of the Venusian his bullet had hit—and succeeded by the dull sound of many rushing feet.

This Absorbing Novel Will Be Continued in the March Issue of WEIRD TALES.
The Next Installment Is Filled with Exciting Action.

Here's a Story That Is Not Easily Forgotten

The Ghost of Silent Smith

An Uncanny Tale

By C. FRANKLIN MILLER

SILENT SMITH was dead to begin with. Of that there could be no doubt. The story of his tragic end was featured in the first column of every sporting sheet in the country and was officially verified, in due course, by the physician, the coroner and the clergyman.

Furthermore, the tragedy itself was visioned by some twenty thousand eyes. They all saw the blinding speed of the ball as it left the pitcher's hand. They saw the melancholy indifference of Silent as he stood at the plate. They saw the ball crash into his right temple and they saw him fall. Some said that he wanted to die, but that is beside the question. Of one thing we are sure. Silent Smith was dead.

I, myself, saw his corpse two days later. It was laid out in sombre black. His coffin was black, his suit was black and black was his bat-winged tie. Black was his favorite color. It harmonized perfectly with the gloom of his disposition and to it he clung, consistent in death as in active life.

The time of his death is likewise certain. It occurred at precisely twenty-two minutes after three, Eastern Standard time. That fact I have verified. It is important. Had it occurred five hours later, there would be nothing unusual to tell about. Silent Smith would have been duly buried, mourned and finally forgotten except for the brilliant record which will always stand as a monument to his pitching skill. As it was, he died at the time stated and his corpse was in the hands of the coroner exactly one hour later.

That same hour found him staging the most remarkable comeback in the history of the national game and this at a point three thousand miles away!

I make that statement with a full knowledge of the actual facts. As a member of Johnny Morkan's Bears that year, I saw the weird occurrence with my own eyes. It happened out on the coast in the presence of some eight thousand fans.

Those in the assembled throng who knew Silent and his mannerisms could only stare and wonder. At the time they had no knowledge of his death. I had. So had the rest of the players on the Bears' bench. A telegram from the East had borne the tragic news. That message shed a ghostly light on the astounding phenomenon and lent to the affair a vague tinge of plausibility, however amazing

Understand, I do not deny the evidence of written records. That would be useless. I know that talkative Andy Gregg was on the mound for the Bears that day. I realize that he was credited with the victory which brought to the club the first pennant we ever flaunted along the coast. And I agree that he deserved the credit. For all practical purposes the voluble lad had labored nine full innings, giving one of the most sensational exhibitions of hurling ever witnessed. Nevertheless, I insist that Silent Smith pitched the Bears into that pennant as surely as his death occurred two hours before the game was called.

Let us see

Silent Smith had been our twirling Ace the greater part of the season. Anyone who ever saw him in action will tell you he was a pitching marvel. He could work in turn every fourth day, do relief duty in between when called upon and still win the vast majority of his games. Notwithstanding his proclivity for hard work, he was strangely lacking in enthusiasm and possessed no more sociability than an ancient tombstone.

Mind, I do not profess to have any first hand knowledge as to the sociability of a tombstone. My head never rested within the shadow of one. It may be that their communion is confined solely to the realm of departed spirits, but so far as the human eye can see they are extremely unsociable objects. And so was Silent.

I well remember the veil of gloom which accompanied his advent into our Spring training camp. He came wandering out upon the field like a lost sheep, trailing a big, black bat—the most dismal-looking rookie I ever laid eyes upon. His face was a masterpiece of dark despair, sketched in deep, weary lines ill-fitted to carry a smile. Shrouded in sack-cloth, he could have done justice to the role of chief mourner at anybody's funeral.

The chief had been busy all morning, looking over a number of "promising" young pitchers whose efforts would have ruined the disposition of any trainer. We had been banging their offerings all over the park. Not one of them had enough stuff to last in a triple-A league. The chief's ire had been mounting accordingly, and the sight of Silent gazing dismally on had no soothing effect on his temper.

"Say, Smith," he growled, "you're supposed to be a pitcher, not a monument. Snap out of it! Let's see your stuff!"

Silent produced a ball from his hip pocket and nursed it sadly for a moment or two. I thought he was going to cry. Instead, he answered the chief in a very meek and tired voice.

"Yes—sir, Mr Morkan!"

Some of us may have grinned in secret, but no one laughed outright. We knew the chief too well. He was fairly boiling inwardly and the lid was due to pop at any moment.

Silent, however, paid absolutely no attention to him. After uttering those surprising words, he ignored the chief completely. Slowly he made his way out on to the vacant mound and started a slower wind-up. The chief swore that this latest addition must have served a term on the box of a funeral cab.

Slow-motioned or not, the lad was uncommonly graceful for a southpaw. That we could see: but what he did to the ball no one ever knew. The thing he threw with that left arm of his was the biggest puzzle I ever stood up against. As it encased in gobs of gloom, the ball came floating up to the plate and drooped dejectedly into the catcher's mitt. It was more like a sigh than any soundless thing I can think of It eluded our bats like a soaring phantom and had us doubled in knots in our efforts to deal it a solid blow.

Within fifteen minutes the chief knew that he had a marvel in tow. I could see him melt as he watched the lad's solemn performance and his face began to beam.

"All right, buddy," he sang out genially "But what do you call it?"

This time Silent made no answer At least, he did not speak. He merely raised his shoulders and sighed—a long, deep sigh. That settled it.

"The sigh-ball," someone suggested.

And the "sigh-ball" it was henceforth.

THE boy could likewise hit. Not that he ever set the league on fire as a slugger, but he revealed a deadly punch with his big, black bat which made him a prince among pinch hitters.

This uncanny ability of his in a pinch was first demonstrated in our opening game of the season. Up until the eighth inning his batting performance had naturally classed him as another weak-hitting pitcher. He had struck out on two occasions and had raised a puny fly in a third attempt. The fourth time he stepped into the box, however, the winning run was resting on third and he brought it in with a pretty single.

How he did it was as much of a mystery as his sigh-ball. His woeful stance at the plate certainly would never have labeled him a batter of any quality. The picture he presented as he clung to his big, black bat was one of utter hopelessness and might have been captioned "The End." Yet, in a pinch he could deliver.

We simply had to accept Silent as he was. There was no changing him. His actions were entirely too unexpected and unnatural to be fathomed. He could strike a batter out and look painfully unhappy over the deed. He could win a game with a timely drive and go into mourning. His normal atmosphere was gloom—deep and mysterious—and it never varied.

With our first swing around the circuit the fame of Silent Smith began to spread. That left arm of his slow-balled its way into the hearts of thousands of fans along the coast. The wild enthusiasm with which his appearance in the box was greeted amounted to a mania and his sigh-ball became the topic of household discussions.

There could be no doubt as to his popularity. He was the biggest drawing card in baseball anywhere at the time. It may have been the sad appeal of his miserable existence which intrigued; it may have been the veil of mystery shrouding his character which fascinated, but, win or lose, he was idolized.

Behind his spectacular hurling we climbed to heights we had never known before. The completion of three-fourths of our schedule found us treading closely on the heels of the flying Leafs who had been perched proudly at the top all season. Small wonder that the town went baseball mad. For the first time in our history we had pennant visions.

Then came the set-back and our visions went a-glimmering. Silent Smith was drafted. With the spreading of the news a howl of disapproval went up along the coast. From three states came the same cry—"crooked baseball!"—and the very popularity of the sport itself was threatened. Outside efforts were made to have Silent recalled, but the trade had been consummated. Our Ace was lost.

With the passing of Silent, the Bears fell upon evil days. We developed a losing streak which threatened to force us out of the running. Even the despised Bisons made a clean sweep of a four game series and a pall of gloom spread o'er the camp.

Both the press and the paying public added to our misery. "Only a flash! The Bears have hit their stride!" That was the consensus wherever fans collected. The thing began to peeve the chief, and in an effort to redeem the club he went out into the stocks and brought back Andy Gregg

NO doubt you have heard of Andy Gregg. He was known as the gamest man in baseball. But when the chief pulled him out of nowhere he was just a big, green, awkward, hitless wonder. He couldn't bat and his fielding was worse. He had just two outstanding accomplishments. He could pitch and he could talk. It was hard to tell in which he excelled.

Regardless of his ability, he labored under difficulties from the very first. A man of lesser courage would have wilted under the strain. Whenever he bove in sight as the pitcher for the day an unreasonable chorus of "boos" greeted him, followed by the sing-song call for Silent Smith. Not that he was unpopular. His spirit was really admired. It was the public's method of voicing its outraged feelings over the loss of an idol. They resented the release of Silent and called for him as only a rabid baseball mob can call. The management was there target — Andy only the goat.

The lad simply laughed and went on pitching. But behind his fine indifference there lurked the ambition to stifle that cry for Silent Smith. Secretly he accepted it as a reflection on his own ability and fought courageously to change the tune. He fairly talked the team out of its woeful slump and hurled it back to its place in the sun.

When the Leafs again invaded our territory for a final series of three, we stood within a half game of being deadlocked for first place. It was the end of our playing schedule, and things did not look so rosy as might be supposed. Our pitching staff had cracked. Talkative Andy was the only dependable hurler we had left after a gruelling month of struggle to maintain our position as runner-up. But Andy was in splendid form. He could still chatter away like an eight-day clock and that was the sign.

To him was given the mound in the first of that deciding series and he won. Four pitchers were hammered unmercifully in the second and we lost. Again we were trailing by a narrow margin, but who was there to hold the enemy in check? Husky Harris was down with tonsilitis. Lefty Lefferts had a broken thumb. Curly Weinert's arm was sore from too much use. As for the rest—but what's the use!

In that hour of need we were all wishing for an iron arm—the arm of Silent Smith. Even the chief had his former Ace in mind. He as much as said so afterward. At the time, however, there was only one thing he could do—and he did it. Talkative Andy was given the assignment. The lad was ready and advertised the fact with his ceaseless jabber.

"We got them going, Johnny," he kept repeating to the chief. "Winter's coming and the leaves are falling. Just keep your eye on the tree!"

We were all gathered in the dug-out, awaiting the call of the gong. That peculiar hush which seizes a crowd immediately before playing time had already descended. Out on the sunswept field a number of white-wings were putting the finishing touches to the sparkling diamond. Behind the plate stood one-armed Jimmy Flynn wielding a megaphone. His booming voice could be heard above the buzzing silence, crying the batteries.

Jimmy got no further in his announcement than the name of Gregg when a spontaneous roar rolled out of the stand and completely submerged the rest. It was the howl of the pack for its idol. Unsportsmanlike, yes; but Andy only chuckled.

"Can you beat it, Johnny," he chirped. "They'd rather have the morgue out there than a live one. We'll bury that bird right now. Come on, you cubs. Watch my smoke!" And he trotted out on the field amid a shower of "boos."

Andy had plenty of "smoke" and displayed it in his own awkward style. All through the inning that call for Silent Smith went on with varying crescendoes but the nerve-racking din had as much effect on the spirit of Andy as water has on the back of a duck. He worked along methodically and effectively, setting the enemy down on exactly six pitched balls. Small wonder that the lad was beaming when he climbed down into the pit after the last "out" had been called. He knew he was right.

And he stayed right. For seven innings he went on talking and pitching, waxing more loquacious as the game progressed. There was no reason for acting otherwise. His smoke-ball was working nicely. It went whizzing past their bats with monotonous regularity. They couldn't even see it. Two hits were all he allowed along that entire stretch.

Apparently the feat meant nothing to the mob. They were entirely engrossed in their favorite pastime. They seemed to take a fiendish delight in heckling the club, individually and collectively, for the release of a star. If we won we were simply playing in luck. If we lost—well, we deserved to. They told us so in as many words. And they howled for Silent Smith.

Andy still held his temper. His control was marvelous. He showed no signs of wavering under the strain. As he came trailing into the dug-out for our turn at bat in the eighth, he was chattering away like a magpie.

"I told you we'd bury that melancholy bird," he told the chief. "He's got one foot in the grave right now. And when I'm done that bunch of fat-heads up there will be throwing in the dirt. 'Twas ever thus, Johnny!"

The chief's face was uncommonly sober as he listened to Andy's chatter. In his hand there fluttered the familiar blue of a telegram. Without a word, he handed it over

Andy read the news and his countenance fell. . . Silent Smith was dead. . . . That was the break which went against him. From that moment on Andy's star began to fade.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," he murmured. "I was only kidding. I didn't know about this, Johnny."

Of course not," answered the chief, perking up. "Don't let it trouble you now. All you've got to think about is the winning of this ball game. . . Come on now, let's go, boys!"

BUT Andy was troubled nevertheless. His helpful chatter ceased and that was the sign. When we again took the field after a fruitless inning it was quite evident that he was not himself. Even the resumed call for Silent Smith seemed to irritate. He dug into the dirt with his spiked shoes; he pulled up blades of grass and started chewing; he mustmed his fingers against the sod; he did a number of things which were not his wont, but which, strangely enough, had characterized the pitching of Silent Smith.

From behind the plate the umpire was calling for action. So was the crowd. And Andy finally got going.

That final inning was a nightmare. Andy walked the first man up and a low rumble of dismay swept the field. The next ball he grooved and Sammy Dawes dropped it over second for a pretty single. The rumble spread to a roar

Andy spat savagely into his glove and glared up at the stand. That persistent cry for Silent Smith had finally penetrated. The lad was riled.

The crowd saw his action and uncorked a veritable flood of jeers. As if the pennant wouldn't have been clinched ere this had Silent been retained. Now look what's happening! Maybe they were right—who knows!

In a rage, Andy sped another over the plate only to see it turned into a tantalizing bunt. In his clumsy effort to field

the ball he stumbled and fell. The ball rolled clear. I pounced upon it from my position at third and kept the Leafs from scoring. But the bases were full with no one out and Andy our only hope.

By this time some eight thousand lusty throats were raising the very—yes, indeed, they were going to that extremity in their frenzied howl to "take him out" and their unreasonable demand for "Silent Smith." Bedlam had broken loose.

I handed the ball to Andy and begged him to take his time.

"It isn't fair, Ken," he exploded wrathfully. "What had I to do with the loss of Silent? I ask you!"

I assured him that every member of that howling mob belonged in a padded cell and added a word or two about our pennant chances.

This latter had a sobering effect. Andy took a time-saving hitch in his belt and seemed to settle down. But the Leafs were not to be denied. They pounded out two successive singles and scored as many runs.

The stand was fairly rocking with the din of stamping feet and shouting voices. Above it all could be heard the name of Silent Smith, but Andy no longer heeded. His rage had apparently subsided. He stood quietly in the center of the diamond and watched big Jess Winters carry his 390 bat to the plate. Here was the biggest batting menace in the league and it required a world of courage to face it.

For a moment Andy never moved, and then he did a characteristic thing. He started talking. He told big Jess to go get a plank. To me it sounded as if the bantering tone were forced, but my heart warmed at the sight of the lad fighting to regain his stride.

"At-a-boy," shouted Tommy Leech from second. "Make him hit it, Andy. We're all out here!"

Andy made no response and we knew that his confidence was not at par. He took one glance at the runner on third and suddenly let go with blinding speed. Big Jess swung with all his power and the ball snapped back at Andy like a rocket. Instinctively Andy raised his arms, but the ball sped through his guard and landed with a sickening thud. The lad crumpled up like a rag.

The clamor of the crowd was instantly choked as they came to their feet in a startled wave and stood staring at the motionless form in the center of the diamond.

I THOUGHT the boy was dead. His face was pasty and his lips bloodless. Apparently his heart had ceased to beat. His eyes were open and staring with that fixed expression commonly associated with sudden death.

For ten minutes we worked over his lifeless form. The only perceptible sign of animation was a faint fluttering of the pulse in his wrist which occurred at intervals of about a minute. The condition was strange enough to make even the club physician look puzzled.

Then, with surprising force, Andy's heart began to pound along like a trip hammer. A patch of color spread in his pallid cheeks. Another minute and his eyelids fluttered weakly, his broad chest heaved and he sighed.

With glassy eyes he stared at the anxious group which circled him. His brow was furrowed as if he were unable to comprehend the meaning of it all. He attempted to climb to his feet, but got no further than his knees. Two of the boys caught him by the arms and started to lead him to the club house. He would not have it. He shook them off and swayed uncertainly into the pitcher's box.

A gasp of astonishment went up from the crowd. No one had ever dreamed that he could resume play. It was unbelievable. They stared at him in silent awe, a mute tribute to the sheer grit of the man.

And then a roar of admiration proclaimed a new idol. Silent Smith was dead!

"Sure you're fit, buddy?" inquired the anxious chief.

For a moment there was no answer. Andy turned a haggard face and gazed at the chief with strangely sad eyes. He looked as if the troubles of the world were resting on his shoulders. Then:

"Andy's all right!"

The words sounded queerly detached. The voice was toneless.

The chief shook his head and slowly left the field. He was going to take a chance. He had to. He sent two of the boys out to the bull-pen to warm up, however, in case Andy couldn't make the grade.

The crowd settled down in the stand and started buzzing like so many bees. Nothing like it had ever been seen. A blow like that would have crippled the spirit of most men, but there was Andy willing to go on. Was he able?

All eyes were glued on the lad as he started digging a hole with his spikes in front of the rubber. He ignored everything else completely. That the team was on the small end of a three-to-nothing score and that a runner was waiting on every sack just itching to swell the lead was of no importance. He scraped and he kicked at the dirt with a slow, measured effort, as if the digging of holes was an art. All this with hanging head and downcast eyes.

At last the hole was perfect and he picked up his glove. To me it looked as if he were still in a daze. He appeared to be uncertain of every movement, as if he were unable to decide just what to do next.

"All right, Andy?" I inquired doubtfully, handing him the ball.

He made no response. He ignored my query as completely as he had everything else. Turning his back, he started a slow, graceful wind-up, every motion of which was perfectly familiar. Deliberately, methodically, he threw five balls over the plate and then waited for the batter to take his stand. And he did not utter a sound.

I shall not attempt to explain it. The facts are all I can deal with. And the fact in this instance was that Andy threw those five balls with his left arm—not in a ridiculously awkward manner, but with perfect ease. Furthermore, his style was identical with that of Silent Smith. And Silent Smith was dead.

But this was no time for theorizing. The batter was set. The umpire was waiting. We fell into position and play was resumed.

Andy's amazing change of pace certainly worked havoc with the enemy bats. Lanky Andrews stood up to the plate like a statue and watched three perfectly good strikes float across. His bat never left his shoulder. Chubby Wilson did a little better. He at least swung. In fact, he swung three times and then followed his lanky teammate back to the pit for the second out. Pinch-hitter Collins nipped the ball for a puny fly, which Jordan, our catcher, smothered in his big mitt, stranding all three of the runners who jammed the bags. And the ball that did it was the "sigh-ball."

THE wonder of the thing held the crowd spell-bound. They watched Andy's weird performance with gaping astonishment. Had the lad changed his style? Could he have perfected that famous delivery in secret practice? Had he been holding out for the past few weeks, thinking to spring a surprise at the psychological moment? Questions were flying fast. Answers were scarce.

Had they known of the fate of Silent Smith their thoughts might have taken a more grewsome channel. Had they read that telegram from the East they might

have agreed that Silent was answering their call at last. As it was, they could only stare and wonder.

When we again trailed into the dugout we found the chief in earnest consultation with Dr. Barrett, the club physician. The word was spread that Andy be left alone, and he was.

He came shuffling off the field with hanging head and settled down into a listless attitude at one end of the bench. Dr. Barrett studied his drooping figure for a moment or two and finally shook his head. So did we all. If the dead can come back in any form, Silent Smith was sitting there in his accustomed place radiating as much gloom as he ever had.

But the most unnatural twist of the whole affair was still in the making.

Pudgy Ayres lined a pretty single into right to start our half of the ninth and the crowd started pulling for us at last. Tommy Leech pushed Pudgy around with a well-placed bunt and beat out the throw to first. Both of them advanced a bag when Marty McGowan walked and the bases were full.

All that we needed now was someone with a punch—someone who could uncork a drive that would sweep the bags and tie the count at three all.

Andy was the next man up and everybody was looking for a punch-hitter. With victory at stake, it would not do to take a chance on the hitless wonder, but the chief must have been playing a hunch. He never said a word when Andy climbed out of the pit and surveyed the batrack with melancholy eyes.

Mine was the only black stick in the lot, and Andy picked it up.

Amid a silence as dead as a graveyard, he dragged the bat up to the plate. Every movement he made was followed by the crowd with straining eyes and bated breath. The moment was fraught with something beyond their knowledge, and the mystery of the thing held them fascinated.

A newspaper photographer took up his stand along the foul line and focused his camera on Andy as he entered the box. If Andy saw him he made no sign. His eyes were glued to the ground. Dolefully he sidled around to the left of the plate, grasped his bat with a weary effort and stood waiting.

Blondy Vance, the opposing slabsman, was visibly shaken. Andy had always been a right-handed batter, and to see him fall into that woeful, left-handed stance with a big, black bat was like looking at a ghost. For a moment Blondy stared and Andy gazed sadly back.

The umpire brought Blondy back to earth and he finally started his wind-up. That was his last pitching effort of the season. The ball went as long toward the plate with absolutely nothing on it. Andy connected with a resounding crash, and three runs came trailing in. The score was tied while Andy with the winning run was rounding third.

He staggered the distance between third and home. His feet were dragging as if loaded with lead. He managed to make the plate with the deciding tally, and then collapsed like an empty sack.

It was fully a half hour before Andy recovered and started jabbering away like the lad we knew. The doctor took him in hand, and Andy was puzzled over the discovery that he himself had finished the game. His last recollection was that of being hit by a batted ball.

I might add that a picture of Andy starting the ball on that home-run journey appeared in the *Daily Mail* issued on September 11, 1912, and created much discussion throughout the country. While somewhat blurry, Andy's face is sufficiently clear to be identified. Covering his face like a veil is a misty something which closely resembles the melancholy features of Silent Smith.

And Silent Smith was dead!

Wonders of Reptilian Age Unearthed

DINOSAURS—the colossal reptile creatures of a prehistoric era—laid eggs five or six inches long. And they had nests like any gentle domestic fowl of today. The early mammalian beasts of Asia and America were kin and roamed across the two continents on the land bridge that joined them in those remote times.

These are some of the discoveries announced by the third Asiatic expedition of the American Museum of Natural History on its return after five months on the Mongolian plains.

One of the leaders of the expedition, Henry Fairfield Osborn, the paleontologist, said the fossil beds found in Mongolia were the largest known to science. For the first time, he explained, explorers had at their disposal terrestrial deposits of enormous extent, still preserved in their pristine grandeur, thus enabling the reconstruction of much of the life in the middle period of the reptilian age.

The adventurers of science returned with the opinion that they had proved the Mongolian plateau to have been the center of dispersion of the most ancient animals traced.

Dr. Osborn and Roy Chapman Andrews, the naturalist, consider a spectacular feature of their discoveries the twenty-five fossilized dinosaur eggs which they found in several nests in sedimentary strata among the skeletons of medium sized dinosaurs of a species known as protoceratops andrewsi. These are the first dinosaur eggs to be revealed to science, according to members of the expedition, who said that hitherto it had not been known that the dinosaur laid eggs. The eggs are elliptical, five to six inches in length, their shells now covered with a buff-colored coating. Their age is estimated at 10,000,000 years.

The explorers brought out seventy-two skulls and twelve complete skeletons of these "terrible lizards," as the two Greek words forming the terms dinosaur describe them.

The expedition also found numerous remains of mammals, principally of a giant rhinoceros-like beast which is said to prove kinship among the earliest fauna of Asia and America. The scientists explained that a land bridge joined the continents in those dim yesterdays.

Do the Dead Return?
Can We Communicate With Ghosts?
Read

Doctor DeBruce

By EARL LEASTON BELL

THE old Tentmaker declared that the rose, once blown, forever dies. Then came the Bard of Avon, who described the Afterland as an unknown country from which no traveler ever returns. I used to laugh with Omar and philosophize with Shakespeare, believing both were right.

I laughed with the Persian scoffer—now they laugh AT me when I tell them why I believe both Omar and the author of Hamlet were wrong. I am convinced the rose lives on, even as Elsie, my rose, still exists. The Afterland may forever remain an unknown strand, but I am certain the path to it is not always a one-way road.

Yes, I am convinced, but I do not care to investigate. To probe too deep into such things often means a long journey from which the traveler returns sans sanity. Therefore, I, Arthur Wrenn, humble barrister of Boston, will have none of it; haven't I said they already laugh at me?

I LOOKED at my watch. Five minutes till closing time. As I turned the key in my office door I was interupted by a messenger. The telegram read:

"Clafton, Ga.

"Arthur Wrenn,
"Boston, Mass.

"Come at once. Heaven and hell depends.

"ARMON DeBRUCE."

Armon DeBruce! A man who, at the age of 27, had disappeared while resident physician of one of the largest hospitals in Boston, and whose whereabouts he had never revealed, even to his own family.

"Heaven and hell depends!" I perused the telegram several times, wondering the while why DeBruce at last had chosen to reveal his hiding place, and the reason for his urgency of appeal. He it was who had attended Elsie Shakleford, my betrothed, in her fatal illness, and we had become the closest of friends.

I recalled the little town from which the telegram was sent—a rustic hamlet nestling in the majestic hills of North Georgia. DeBruce and I had at one time spent several days there, camping out on a hunt for small game and quail, with which the woods abounded at the time.

En route to my bachelor quarters, I fell to ruminating on DeBruce's past. He had been most successful in his chosen profession, and could not have asked for a more promising future at the time he so abruptly abandoned his career and disappeared. Though a fellow of marked eccentricities, he had a pronounced *penchant* for making friends,

and everything in the line of good luck seemed to swerve his way. Fortune had smiled on him, and he had returned the compliment by systematically disposing of much of his income in various charitable ways. A friend of the unfortunate, much of his time was spent at the bedside of the poor.

But reminiscences were crowded out by conjecture over DeBruce's telegram. Undoubtedly he must be ill, or in deep trouble. Anyway, it set me thinking.

I AWOKE early and purchased a few periodicals with which to while away the trip to Georgia.

The journey was without incident save for a strange dream that night which was so vivid that I awoke and slept no more. It seemed I heard a voice, fraught with memories of the past, crying out "Too late, but not too late!" The voice sounded weirdly like DeBruce's.

Next morning I dismissed it as an absurd fancy occasioned by my concern over DeBruce's telegram and the fact that I was not accustomed to making long journeys by rail.

Came the hour when the train was struggling over the Blue Ridge, and the early afternoon found me whirling through the stately hills of North Georgia, where the iridescent hues of autumn blended into the blue background of the pines. At four o'clock I reached my destination, the only passenger to alight.

Going into the little station to inquire the way to DeBruce's dwelling, I found the place deserted save for a little pickaninny who eyed me curiously, particularly after I queried him. After a moment he stammered that Dr. DeBruce's house was located about two miles west of the village, and pointed out the road.

Tossing the boy a coin, I set out to walk the distance.

After making a few inquiries of natives along the way, I soon neared the house. As I approached, I studied its appearance and wondered why DeBruce, who in his youth so loved the magnificent, could be content to dwell in such a place. It was a roomy structure, built on the colonial style, but apparently put together hurriedly and left unpainted. The pathway, palisaded by ancient oaks, was a foot deep in leaves, and the trees themselves gave evidence of not having been trimmed in years. The great oaks stood like giant sentinels guarding the desolation. Nowhere was there sign of life, save for the shrieking of bluejays and the distant hammering of a woodpecker on a moribund pine.

Mounting the steps, which were carpeted with leaves, I saw before me a massive door, ajar, revealing the dark interior of a spacious hall. A moment's hesitation, and I knocked lightly. Nearly five minutes elapsed before I rapped again, this time more forcibly, but the only answer was an echo that reverberated ominously through the hall—a lingering echo that seemed to die reluctantly before the silence of the approaching night.

Before I could rap again I was startled by a deep growl, and, glancing behind, saw a large setter dog, his fangs bared. The animal growled again, and then his mood suddenly changed, the snarl turning into a whine as he looked at me in that piteous manner which only a dumb brute in pain or hunger can register. I spoke kindly to the animal, and he eventually left me, curling himself in a bed of leaves on the far end of the porch.

I rapped on the great door for the third time, louder than ever. Again, only an echo. I repeated the knocking, and then, pushing open the door, I peered into the hall.

Only shadows; but a door to the left was open, revealing a room fairly well lighted by the rays of the descending sun straying through the windows. Thinking that DeBruce might be in a distant part of the house, and assuming that he would not take offense at finding me inside, I decided to enter and await his coming. First glance showed the room to be a library. Books were everywhere, and over the shelves were many pictures, ancient and dusty. I noticed that the largest picture, which occupied a central position between the shelves, was turned with its face to the wall.

I conjectured that the picture must be that of some fair girl whom DeBruce had loved and lost, although, as far as I knew, he had always been a misogynist. But his nature was such that he would have loved with an almost mythical intensity had he ever loved at all. The thought came to me that the original of the portrait might have been the cause of his forsaking his career and living the life of a recluse.

I became deeply reminiscent there in the stillness of the apparently deserted house. If, as had been said, darkness may become so intense that one may feel it, then, by the same token, silence may become so deep that one may hear it. And so it was that I fancied I heard voices of other days, and—above all—the love-song of Elsa.

How long I sat there lost in meditation I cannot recall. Having lost much sleep on the train, I became drowsy; and, to arouse myself, walked over to a shelf of books. Resetting myself, I tried to read, but the letters blurred. Drowsiness was overcoming me. Twice I thought to leave the house and return to the station, and twice I decided that DeBruce might be out for a late afternoon walk and would return soon. I placed the book on a table in the center of the room and walked to an open window. Outside, all nature was seeking sleep. Even the jays had quit their quarreling.

AS I gazed out upon the blue hills I became aware of a presence in the room, though I had heard no footfall.

"Welcome, Arthur," said a voice I recognized, and I turned to meet my host. Changed almost beyond recognition, it was an aged, palsied man who stood before me. He seemed to be suffering from some devitalizing malady. His sunken eyes held no lustre. His complexion was as yellow as the old lace curtains that shaded the windows. I was indeed startled, but composed myself and met him half-way, extending my hand. But instead of the warm clasp that I expected, DeBruce seemed not to notice my proffered greeting.

"I knew you were coming," he said, and I involuntarily stepped back; for in the articulation his lips moved in a most horribly indescribable manner. His grimaces were terrible to behold, particularly when he attempted to emphasize his words with a smile. I returned a greeting that must have been almost as incoherent as his. He seemed to notice my confusion, and his lips again twitched in an uncanny smile.

"Arthur," he said, "I sent for you because there is something I must tell you before it is too late. A week ago I was stricken with paralysis. See, I cannot close my eyes. It is with the greatest effort that I speak. But first tell me how you have fared since I saw you last. Let's talk of bygone days."

We dwelled in reminiscences for a little while, and DeBruce then turned the conversation by asking me to look over the pictures with which the walls were crowded. They were old, and the faces—those of scientists and medical men—were scarcely discernible, what with their covering of dust and the gathering shadows.

Night was falling fast. I turned to my host, and, seeming to divine my thoughts, he tottered to the table and lighted a large oil lamp which, though it dispelled the gloom fairly well, flickered in a manner grotesquely in keeping with the weirdness of its surroundings.

As I looked at each picture, DeBruce told me what the original had accomplished in science. I noticed that his enunciation was becoming clearer and his lips twitching less. While I was studying the likeness of a French scientist, who according to my host, had been blown to atoms while experimenting with some "rejuvenating" acids of his own concoction, I heard a whine behind me. The dog had forsaken the porch and entered the room. I stroked the animal gently, and he looked at me so piteously, whining the while, that I turned to DeBruce for an explanation. Again he anticipated my words.

"Poor Leo," he said. "He has not eaten in several days."

At his master's words, the dog bristled, then cowered to the floor and crept out of the door. My host seemed not to remark the animal's queer conduct and proceeded to discuss the scientist in the picture.

I soon reached the large painting turned to the wall, and started to pass it by. But DeBruce gestured for me to turn it around. It was with difficulty that I succeeded, and then—

"My God!" I cried, stepping back aghast.

It was a likeness—a life-size oil painting—of Elsie Shakleford! And O, the horror of it! But for the eyes—violet eyes that had been with me always—I would not have recognised her, for from her lips—disfigured lips—a crimson stream apparently had been painted and mingled with the red of a rose on her breast. The flower also was disfigured, and its red had trickled down and daubed the whiteness of her raiment.

Speechless, I turned to DeBruce. My face was as bloodless as his, and I was trembling violently. He again motioned for me to be seated, and I complied, shielding my eyes from the gruesome sight on the canvas.

Again my host was speaking. I listened with bowed head.

"You have seen the portrait that has driven me mad," he began. "You see that the life-blood seems to be flowing from her pallid lips and that it stains her breast. Every time I look at the picture her lips seem to say 'Murderer! Murderer!' See, the frightened, piteous stare! Arthur, turn the picture to the wall, so I may tell you the ghastly story!"

THERE in the dancing shadows, as I caught hold of the gilded frame, I again glanced at the pathetic face on the canvas, and it appeared that Elsie's eyes were fixed on DeBruce in a wild and stony stare; that her wilted lips were trying to find speech.

Her eyes then turned to me, and in their violet depths I beheld a ray of the lovelight that had played there so long ago, and her lips seemed to shape into the ghost of a smile. . . . Maybe it was only a phantasmagoria of lamplight and shadows.

The task completed, I tottered back to the chair and again shielded my face with my hands. DeBruce, still standing behind me, continued his story. Throughout the unbelievable recital I never raised my head, overcome by the horror of what I had seen.

"Arthur," he said, "I killed Elsie in trying to kill you. I loved her desperately, and while she was convalescing in the hospital I tried to win her. Finally I told her of my love, and learned that it could never be returned. It was the first I knew of your approaching nuptials. She was the only woman I had ever cared for, and I had loved her since childhood. The hope of winning her had spurred me on to success in my profession. When I learned my fate I went insane—a cool, calculating madness. Next day you came to see her, and when you held her in your arms, I decided to kill you.

"Chance favored me, for Elsie soon rang for a glass of water. I filled two glasses, and into one I poured a few drops of a colorless drug I had formulated. The ice in the glasses tinkled merrily as I brought the water into the room, and in my madness I fancied the music that of wedding bells. The poison was for you

"Again chance favored me. You, too, were thirsty and reached for the glass before I could offer it. You smiled as you drank to Elsie's health. Mine was a devil's smile when in my room a few minutes later I drank of wine to your death.

"Two days later Elsie died. In my fiendish anticipation I had given her the wrong glass. After discovering my mistake I was no longer a madman. Day and night I watched by her bedside and sought to undo my crime. But the drug was too potent. She was unconscious and did not hear my confession and prayers as I knelt by her bed. She died in unspeakable agony, a hemorrhage staining her raiment as you see it in the picture.

"You know the rest, Arthur. Afraid to face the judgment of men, I fled. But no one suspected me, and I would have been safe in Boston. Now, that I soon must face the inevitable judgment, I confess to you

"God knows I have tried to atone! From a small photograph of Elsie I had an oil painting made, and placed it in my room. Every night, kneeling before the portrait, I prayed her forgiveness. And nightly I noticed a gradual change in the picture. Slowly her features began to alter. Her eyes seemed to alternate between an accusing stare and the dull glaze of death. At first I dismissed it as a defect in the oil. Then, as the metamorphosis became more pronounced, I said it was but the imagining of an avenging conscience, and prayed all the more.

"Almost imperceptibly, the disfiguration continued until I saw Elsie as she appeared in the agonies of death. For years I continued to implore her forgiveness, but the only answer was her piteous, accusing stare which seemed to focus on me whenever I entered the room. Eventually, I turned the portrait to the wall, but I could not thus hide the accusations of my conscience, and I soon became a decrepit old man. But now I believe Elsie has forgiven me, and it is without fear that I prepare to leave the world behind. Farewell, Arthur; I ask you to forget if you cannot forgive."

I RAISED my head and found the room in darkness. I shouted DeBruce's name. No answer. Again I shouted, and after I had struck a match, the feeble flame of which threw phantom shadows on the walls, a terror-stricken echo came back to me through the gloom. Experiencing cold fear for the first time in my life, I rushed frantically out of the room and down the steps. The station was my destination.

I had gone only a short distance when I saw a nebulous glow in the darkness ahead; a vaporous, weirdly luminous substance hovering over the path. I stopped and regarded the phenomenon with awe, for its phosphorescence was beautifully different from any I had ever seen.

The whirling of the substance rapidly gained momentum. It was taking shape!

First the faint outlines of a human form; then the semblance of a beaming face; a metamorphosis from angel to woman—*and Elsie stood before me!*

There was nothing wraithlike in her appearance as she came forward to meet me, except her raiment, which still was luminous.

I stepped forward to meet her—to clasp her in my arms as of old—but she held up a warning hand.

She smiled. She spoke.

"Arthur," she said, "I have forgiven him; he has atoned. You, too, must for-

give. I am alive, Arthur, even as you are alive, but our spheres are different. I still love you, and some day you will come to me. As a token of this, I will leave with you the engagement ring you gave me in the long ago. I will drop it into your hand, as I must not touch you."

She slipped the ring from her finger and gave it to me.

"Farewell, beloved, I must return to my plane."

She wafted me a kiss—and was gone. For a fleeting moment a faintly luminous spiral marked the place where she had been.

THE station agent was a typical native who seemed both surprised and glad at my appearance. After I had bought my ticket, he ejected an inordinate quid of cut-plug and drawled

"A fellow never knows how many friends he's got until he's daid. That fu'nal this afternoon was the biggest I've ever seen in these parts."

I nodded and inquired the time the train would arrive. He told me I had but a few minutes to wait.

"Great man, was Dr. DeBruce," remarked the station man as I took a seat in the vacant waiting room. "Everybody for miles 'round was at his fu'nal today. Did I see you thar?"

"What's that!" I ejaculated, the ticket falling from my hand.

"Dr. DeBruce's fu'nal today — thought I mought have seen you thar," the man repeated, evidently not remarking my astonishment.

I understood—that is, if the realization that one has just finished talking with a man just buried can be classified as understanding of any sort.

It wasn't necessary to ask the man for particulars. Upon discovering I was not at the funeral, he was eager to tell the whole story. At least a hundred carriages and automobiles were there, he said, and hundreds of the physician's friends had come afoot, many from adjoining counties. His narrative drifted to the life DeBruce had led since coming to Clofton.

From the Southerner's drawl I was able to gather that DeBruce had devoted most of his time to caring for the sick and needy in the village and in the mountains, and had never accepted a penny for his services. About two years before his death, however, his health began to decline; and thereafter he was seldom seen to leave his estate. It was rumored he had locked himself up with his books on science and "spiritism," as the native called it. Two days before my arrival at Clofton, a hillman, calling at his house for medicine, had found him dead in his library. The coroner had pronounced it paralysis.

The fellow was still talking when the locomotive shrieked in the distance. Five minutes later it was speeding me northward.

YES, maybe it was all a dream—a nightmare superinduced by reminiscences there in the gloomy library. Yet I will swear I was awake through it all, and that it was no hallucination, no phantom of imagery, that related the story of a madman's crime—no incubus, that vision of Elsie.

If it *was* a dream, *where did I get this ring?*

Perhaps it is a matter for psychologists and other delvers into the Unknown to investigate. As for me, Arthur Wrens, I repeat I will have none of it.

Woman Fails To Win Psychic Prize

THE REV. MRS. JOSI K. STEWART, who tried to win the $2,500 prize offered by the Scientific American for real psychic phenomena, will not get the prize. That was made sufficiently clear today when the investigators for the publication disclosed their official report on the five seances with Mrs. Stewart.

The report accused the Cleveland mystic of trying to deceive the world and it answered Mrs. Stewart's recent request for some cool, scientific gentleman to explain how she got her spirit writings.

The sentence of the subcommittee which investigated Mrs. Stewart's "phenomena" and took evidence at her five seances, was as follows:

"Mrs. Stewart undertook to produce, for the Scientific American investigating committee, independent spirit writings upon cards supplied by the committee. The subcommittee in charge of Mrs. Stewart's sittings finds that she has failed to do this. She has produced writings only on cards brought to the sitting by her and substituted by her for those supplied by the committee.

"The subcommittee therefore rules that Mrs. Stewart has failed to produce any demonstrably genuine psychic phenomena and that her claim to the Scientific American's award and to the committee's further attention stands vacated.

"J. Malcolm Bird,

"Secretary, Subcommittee."

Mr. Bird added that scientific tests by the subcommittee had disclosed that on the first seance five cards were missing when the Rev. Mrs. Stewart left. He added that the investigators believed Mrs. Stewart took them with her and then obtained white index cards that looked like twins of the ones she took.

A Fragment of Weird Fiction

THE HATER

By B. W. WILSON

IVAN KOBELEV was filled with hate from his birth.

Always he had hated someone—something. It almost seemed that he could not live without hate. His whole nature was cold, sneering—and saturated with hate.

Before he was able to walk he jabbed with impotent rage at the little pig eyes of his fat, good-natured nurse. She only laughed at him and thought he would some day be a great man.

As soon as he was large enough to steal kopeks from his father's purse, and pour salt into the samovar, Ivan transferred his unnatural attentions to the one he should have loved—his mother.

But she still loved him. She had prayed, when he nestled in her arms a tiny babe, that he would grow to be a great, good man. All the Kobelevs had been great, but she prayed that he might be good, and kind.

Soon that prayer seemed strange to her. She began to wonder how she could have thought there was any kindness in Ivan's little hate-filled heart. Then she prayed only that she might not live to see her son a man; a strange prayer—for a mother.

Once, as she sat mending his little woolen shirt by the firelight, the boy with a fiendish expression on his face, caught up the scissors and hurled them full at her face—cutting a deep gash on her cheek.

Ivan's father roared with delight, his flaming red beard shaking with approval.

"Ha ha"—he laughed gratingly. "His first blood—and in the family. Keep on, Ivan my boy, and some day you will be a great soldier like your father." Proudly he stroked his stiff whiskers.

Then with a kind of brutal kindness he spoke to his wife, who was timidly trying to staunch the flow of blood with her kerchief.

"Never mind, Anna; the lad has spirit and will soon be a man. His country will need such men"—his voice dropped a trifle—"when we are ready."

Anna paled, but knew better than to speak.

"Yes," her husband continued with his inhuman smile, "we shall need such men as he. Men who can forget their families, forget their wives, forget everything." He laughed: the raucous laugh of one who dreams a bad dream—a nightmare.

But Ivan could not always remain a boy. He grew; and with him grew deeper and blacker his obsessing hatred. No longer did he give vent to it in open acts of violence. He had learned that he could give his mother more pain by little acts of disobedience—contemptuous ignoring of her authority.

Sometimes, as she was tucking him into his bed at night, his body would grow rigid at her touch.

"Oh! How I hate you!" he would murmur through his tense lips.

So, after a few more years, Anna Kobelev died, carrying the scar on her cheek to the grave. The doctor said "pneumonia"—but old Nitchkof, the town sage, shook his head doubtfully sadly. He had known Anna when she was a girl.

For a time Ivan wandered about from place to place, dazed. The object of his hate gone, his life seemed purposeless. Finally he joined the army and was sent to a little garrison in Siberia.

He was a good soldier, he could command men, and soon he was made an officer. But all the soldiers hated him for his cruelty.

"Ah," he would say to a villager brought before him, "Your reindeer broke out again yesterday."

"Yes," the peasant would stammer, fascinated by the terrible glint in the other's eyes, "but the soldiers took away part of my fence to—"

"Twenty blows with the whip," Ivan would order calmly.

He never imposed fines—he did not seem to care for money. But he was always out in the yard to see his sentence executed. As the blood oozed from the back of his tortured victim, freezing in the icy air, he smiled. It was as if some hunger within him were being satiated.

It was soon after he became commander of the post that Ivan met Maria Tchernov. Maria—the "flower girl" the peasants called her—was eighteen, with a light heart and a smiling face.

"Oho," she scoffed when they told her of their hard-hearted commander, "show me this cruel man and I will tame him for you." She shook her bright curls merrily.

But when she saw him, all her roguishness left her.

"Oh!" she breathed, and fled blushing to her mother's cottage. There, in her little room, she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Little Mother," she moaned, "it can't be true. He is so handsome, so tall—" her face was covered with a shy smile as she lifted it from her hands, and defiantly she threw back her head—"and I—love him," she finished quickly.

Ivan was bewildered by the "flower girl." It may be that he remembered vaguely his mother—and was sorry. But he could not understand himself. No more could he enjoy the sufferings of others. Slowly the hate began to leave his face. The glint died out of his eye.

The soldiers noticed it and nodded understandingly at each other.

"The little flower girl," they said thankfully, "has captured him."

At Christmas time they were married, and Ivan took his little bride to live in the commandant's cottage.

Soft and tender he was with her. Never would he let her do any hard work.

"Your hands are for play, Maria," he would say. "Mine"—thrusting out his brawny fists—"for work."

So they lived, peacefully and quietly, while the villagers went about their work smiling.

"Our little flower girl has changed his heart," they said to one another.

Now, when a citizen was brought to him, Ivan looked at him kindly. "So your reindeer have broken out again?" he would ask gently. "That is too bad. I will send the soldiers to build you a better fence in the morning."

Thus it came about that all the villages began to love Ivan and Maria, the "flower gods" they called them.

It was soon after their little golden-haired son was born that Maria began to fade. She did not sicken, but, like a beautiful, deep-hued, delicate flower, she faded away softly. Finally she went—a smile on her face and her hand tightly clasped in Ivan's.

(Continued on page 78)

A Series of Startling Articles

WEIRD CRIMES

No. 4. Swiatek, the Beggar

By SEABURY QUINN

THE landlord of the Silver Axe was on the verge of nervous prostration. Half an hour before a messenger had brought tidings of a great English milord whose coach had broken down a scant ten miles from the hamlet of Polonyja—even now the wealthy foreigner (were not all the English fabulously rich?) and his servants were making their way as best they could along the forest road, and the Silver Axe was the first inn they would pass on their journey to the town of Dabkow.

The winter of 1848 had been cruel to the inhabitants of the lordship of Parkost, in Austrian Galicia. The peasants, who got their meager living by hewing down the tall fir trees and floating them down the Vistula to market, had been sorely plagued by deep snows and frozen streams. Disease and lack of fodder had depleted their small supply of livestock, and the taxes of the landed proprietors of whom they held their hovels and little garden patches had been heavier than usual.

In these circumstances, there had been few coppers to buy beer and fewer silver pieces to buy wine at the tap room of the Silver Axe, and the landlord's purse had suffered in consequence. Now, when May had come to drive away the lingering frosts of winter, and the menfolk had gone to their summer work of resin collecting, came word of the wealthy *Englander*, dropped into the landlord's inn like the purses of the good Saint Nicholas into the laps of the dowerless maidens — and there was naught with which to prepare a feast for the unexpected guest.

Chickens had perished on their roosts in the biting winter frosts, one of the pigs had died of the cholera and the other had been taken by the Imperial tax collector in lieu of unforthcoming coin; only the ducks remained.

The ducks! That was the solution of the problem. The landlord would regale the Englishman with roast duck. "Come, come," he called to his bustling *Anusfrau*, "make haste; kill me our three ducks. We must have them roasted to a turn, with pickled fish and watercress and the best of our wine for the rich *Englander*. Ah, 'twill be a meal fit for the table of a duke! Doubtless our guest will reward us with a gold piece, mayhap two!"

Followed such an agonized squawking as never before was heard in all duckdom, as the landlady and her assistants ran a dignified and much scandalized drake to his doom. But of the slaughtered drake's harem no sign was to be found. Search high, search low, no frightened "quark!" gave testimony of a cowering duck hiding from the axe. Time pressed, the Englishman drew nearer with every passing minute, and only one duck lay waiting to grace the table for the famished foreigner and his hungry servants.

A trembling stable boy ran to tell the landlord. The landlord tore at his hair and beard, calling freely and impartially on all the red-and-black letter saints in the calendar to witness his misfortune. He also cursed the stable boy who brought him the evil tidings. But most of all, most horribly, most blasphemously, he cursed the unknown miscreant who had robbed him of his ducks and of the profit he would have made from the Englishman.

"What misbegotten descendant of an unvirtuous wild pig would do this thing to me?" the landlord questioned of the unanswering forest wind. "Who would steal from me? Do I not attend regularly at holy mass and give liberally to the poor? Do I ever turn beggars from my fire—

"Ah—!" The landlord ceased his curses and put on his hat. The rehearsal of his charities had turned his thoughts upon beggars in general, and from mendicants in general his thoughts had turned upon the neighborhood beggar in particular.

Scarcely a stone's throw from the Silver Axe stood the hut of Swiatek, the beggar of Polonyja. Summer and winter this old man was to be seen squatting at the church door, his long, white beard falling to his knees, as he held forth his wooden basin and whined, "An alms, an alms for the love o' Christ, kind friends. Give to the needy, and the Lord will reward you. Alms, alms for the love o' God!"

The landlord cherished no love for Swiatek. On more than one occasion he had caught him in the act of pilfering from the Silver Axe's none too plentifully stocked pantry, and on more occasions than one he had proof he had suspected him of thievery.

To be sure! Who would have been more likely to make away with the so precious ducks than this whining mendicant who, though strong and hardy as any man his age in the forest-bound circle of Tornow, preferred to eke out an existence on what he could beguile from the pockets of honest laboring-men.

The landlord picked up a stout cudgel and set off for Swiatek's hut. "Has the rogue stolen my ducks," he muttered, "I'll write the Eighth Commandment on his thievish hide with this." He brandished his club menacingly as he neared the beggar's door.

The strong and savory odor of roasting flesh greeted his nostrils as he crept nearer. Swiatek, the beggar, the man who lived without work, was preparing a meal of meat, while the great English milord must go hungry and the worthy landlord of the Silver Axe unrewarded!

"Villain!" the landlord shouted, bursting through the door. "I have caught thee red-handed. I will teach thee to steal ducks from honest men while their guests cool their heels in hunger!"

Swiatek stepped back quickly from the fireplace over which he had been bending, at the same time stuffing some object about the size of a duck out of sight beneath his peasant's blouse.

In a trice the furious landlord had him by his venerable white beard, shaking

him as a terrier does a rat. Back and forth the inn-keeper shook the beggar, berating him as only a man whose good fortune has been suddenly snatched away can.

The half-roasted piece of meat which Swiatek had all this time clutched to his bosom beneath his loose blouse slipped from his grasp and fell rolling and bumping to the floor.

It was the severed head of a fourteen-year-old girl.

HORROR-PARALYZED, the inn-keeper stared at the grisly thing. Catching his breath in short, panting sobs, Swiatek slunk into a corner of the hut. Next instant, with an inarticulate cry of mingled rage and fear, he made at the landlord, a butcher knife brandished in his skinny hand.

The knife flashed forward for a stroke, but the swish of the inn-keeper's oaken cudgel was followed by a heavy thud. Swiatek, the beggar, sank to the hut's earthen floor without a cry.

As fast as terror-spurred messengers could summon them, gendarmes from Dabkow came to Polomyja and hustled their prisoner to jail.

All along the route Swiatek cried out like a trapped forest-wolf, flinging himself repeatedly to the earth and attempting suicide by trying to swallow clods of road-clay and stones. His captors choked these from his throat with no very gentle hands. Austrian gendarmes were never noted for tenderness toward their prisoners, and the already-proven crime of this felon was not the sort to inspire them with an extra amount of courtesy.

The prisoner was taken at once before the Protokol (committing magistrate's court) and remanded to prison pending an investigation. Gendarmes were sent to search his dwelling, while others scoured the forest-country for witnesses.

In Austria, as in Germany, courts and prosecutors were not hampered by refinements of evidence such as those in vogue in Common Law countries. Everything which had a bearing on the case in hand was eagerly sought and brought out at the trial, regardless of whether it was hearsay or not. Even rumor was listened to on the odd chance it would throw light on the case, the judges deciding what should receive consideration in influencing their decision.

For this reason, the agents of justice brought into court a considerable number of witnesses, whose stories, while inadmissible under British or American law, were, nevertheless, of great interest.

The residents of the lordship of Parkost in the vicinity of Polomyja were, for the most part, wretchedly poor. They were woodcutters who tilled small garden patches in the intervals between their logging work. Each held his house and farmlet by a sort of villein tenure—that is, he paid no money rental, but was bound to work a fixed number of days each year for his landlord. This scheme of payment by labor, while it might at first glance seem the fairest treatment of people whose stock of cash was always scanty, was really one of the contributing causes of the peasants' poverty, since the landlords invariably exacted labor from their tenants at times when the tenants' own crops were ripe for harvesting, or when the cutting of timber would prove most remunerative.

Nevertheless, in spite of their poverty the villagers had always a ready hand for those who besought their charity, and witnesses who had transacted business with Swiatek, always to the latter's advantage, were numerous.

One of the first to testify at the hearing was a peasant woman who, some two years before, had taken compassion on the old beggar as he crouched at the church door and bidden him come to her cottage for food. He had at first appeared reluctant, asking her if she could not give him a copper instead; but when she charitably insisted on his sharing the Sunday meal with her and her goodman, he assented.

They pressed such food as they had upon him, but he seemed strangely lacking in appetite. While he ate a little bread, he turned from the meat pie they offered with what seemed to her like repugnance.

After dinner, when the master of the house presented the beggar with a pipe of tobacco, he became more genial, recounting stories of his adventures upon the road and amusing the children with a few tricks of simple legerdemain.

One child, a chubby little girl of nine or ten, attracted the old man's attention particularly. Swiatek felt in his pocket and produced a ring consisting of a piece of colored glass set in lead foil. This he presented to the child, who ran off delighted to show her companions.

"Is that little maid your daughter?" he asked the housewife.

"No," she answered, "she is an orphan. There was a widow in this place who died, leaving the child, and I have taken her into my family. One mouth more will not matter much, and the good God will bless us for our charity."

"Aye, aye," agreed Swiatek. "The orphans and fatherless are ever under His peculiar care."

"She is a good little thing, and gives us no trouble," the woman resumed. "You go back to Polomyja tonight?"

"I do," the beggar answered. Then, as the little orphan ran up to him: "Ah, you like the ring, little one? It is a beautiful thing, is it not? I found it under a big tree to the left of the churchyard—who knows, there may be dozens more in the same spot?

"You must go there after dark has fallen and turn round three times. Then say 'Zabo.' Look among the tree roots, and you will surely find more rings."

"Come!" screamed the delighted child to her playmates. "Let us go to look for rings."

"Nay, nay," Swiatek cautioned. "You must seek singly—one at a time—or the charm will not work."

The children scampered off to the wood, and Swiatek flung his cloak about his stooping shoulders.

"You may thank me for ridding you of the children's noise for a time, at least," he laughed as he opened the door to leave.

HE left the cottage, walking rapidly, not going down the road, but among the somber evergreens which reached nearly to the front door.

An hour later the woodcutter's children returned, out of breath with running. The little orphan girl was not with them.

Vaguely, incoherently, as terrified children will, they told how she, braver than the rest, had gone alone beneath the shadow of the fir tree where rings were to be found; how she called out the word "*Zabo!*" lustily, then how a startled scream had suddenly checked, like the ceasing of a night bird's cry when the bullet strikes its mark. They told, too, of a monstrous form, like that of a cloaked and bearded man, half distinguished through the gloom, and of hurrying footsteps sounding fainter and still more faintly through the underbrush.

"It was a wolf," the woman said, crossing herself piously. The talk of the cloaked and bearded man she set down to childish imagination.

Several school boys told how one of their companions, a boy named Peter, had loitered behind his fellows one day after school. They saw him leave the path, they thought they saw him talking with a man wearing a long cloak and having a white beard, though they could not be certain of this. One thing was sure. Peter was never seen again.

**See article III of this series, The Magic Mirror Murders.*

A wealthy Russian Jew told of the loss of his servant maid, a girl of thirteen. One night she left his house on an errand. When she failed to return he became uneasy and set out to look for her with a lantern. Her footprints were plainly marked in the light snow; it could be seen where she left the road, wandering into a copse of fir trees. Here other footprints — much larger and heavier — joined hers. For a time the two trails went on together, then, at a spot where the trees were so thick no snow had drifted down upon the brown carpet of pine-needles, all trace of the girl and her companion was lost. At any rate, the girl was never seen again.

The gendarmes sent to search Swiatek's cottage returned with staring eyes and bated breath. In a chest, neatly trussed up, like a fowl ready for the spit, they had found the legs and thighs of a half-grown girl—the child whose head Swiatek had attempted to hide when discovered by the landlord of the Silver Axe. Beneath the earthen floor of the hut they had found caps and parts of clothing sufficient to account for thirteen children and a young woman.

The witnesses disposed of, Swiatek was summoned before the magistrate. For a time he stood dumb before the court, not touched with remorse for his hideous crimes, but paralyzed with fear for himself.

With the notes of the testimony before him, the magistrate commenced interrogating the prisoner, but wordless moans were the only replies his questions evoked. At last, by accident, the beggar's lips were opened.

"You must have been insane to commit these acts," the judge remarked.

A crafty look, a gleam of hope, came into the prisoner's little eyes, for, ignorant though he was, he knew the law forebore to punish those whose misdeeds were committed while insane.

"Your Excellency has said no more than the truth," he replied. "I was, indeed, a lunatic when I transgressed so terribly. But now, your Excellency, I am restored. I pray you, let me depart hence. My reason is returned, and I will sin no more."

"Tell us first how you came to do such savage and unchristian acts," prompted the judge. "It is necessary that our records be complete before we dispose of the case."

"Disposing of the case" was a phrase capable of more than one interpretation; but dread of punishment and overwhelming hope of freedom led Swiatek to place the most favorable construction on the words. Smiling amiably at the magistrate, stroking his patriarchal beard as he talked, he related one of the most amazing criminal histories ever heard in a court of law.

Three years before, during the bitter winter of 1846, he had been hastening through the forest to his cottage in Polomyja, just as the sun was setting. The frosts which set in early in autumn had held steadily, and the countryside had suffered greatly. Responses to his whine for alms had been few and small, and he was near to perishing with cold and hunger. As he neared the village he came upon the still-glowing embers of a small Jewish tavern which had burned down that morning, and paused to warm himself beside the smoldering ruins. Creeping nearer for extra warmth, he noticed the charred remains of the tavern's keeper, who had perished in the flames.

The scent and sight of the roasted flesh so worked upon his hunger that he was unable to resist tearing off a bit of flesh and tasting it.

As the horrid morsel passed his lips he became, to quote his own words, "as it were, a ravening wolf."

Rending, tearing, even growling in his throat like a brute beast, he satisfied his hunger, then stuffed his beggar's pouch with material for another horrible repast.

Suddenly, the enormity of his act struck him. Flinging the pouch with its grisly load from him, he ran pellmell down the road until exhaustion compelled him to stop.

As he sat upon a wayside stone regaining his breath, the desire for another meal like the revolting one he had just completed began to steal over him like a drunkard's craving for drink. Battling with his conscience, yet yielding, he retraced his steps, recovered his pouch and hastened home.

From that night he had never eaten any other meat. Bread and vegetables he had accepted from kindly disposed peasants who pitied him, but their offers of meat filled him with an almost uncontrollable revulsion.

The little orphan girl whose disappearance had been testified to by her foster parents was his first victim. He had killed and eaten her as unconcernedly as another peasant would have butchered a calf or pig.

Freely, as the magistrate questioned him, he admitted murder after cold-blooded murder and case after case of cannibalism. With a complacency which brought a shudder of horror to all who watched, he rolled back his sleeves and loosened the collar of his blouse that the court might see how sleek and fat he had grown upon his frightful meals.

"And now," he concluded, looking expectantly at the magistrate, "I have told you all, your Excellency. Surely you will let me go!"

"Inhuman monster," the judge replied, "out of your own mouth you have condemned yourself. No madman could have told his tale so reasonably. If there be any justice in the Empire of Austria, you shall die upon the scaffold, and the public executioner will hang his head in shame that his duties force him to lay hands on so vile a wretch as you."

Screaming with terror, Swiatek was dragged back to his cell, for his terror-palsied legs refused to bear his weight.

Next morning, when the turnkey of the jail made his tour of inspection, he found that justice had been cheated.

Swiatek, the beggar, had hanged himself to the bars of his prison window.

This is the fourth article of a series that Sunbury Quinn is writing for Weird Tales. *The fifth will appear in an early issue.*

THE HOUND

(Continued from page 56)

of green jade, I merely screamed and ran away [illegible] . . . . . dissolving into peals of hysterical laughter.

Madness rides the star-wind. . . . claws and teeth shattered on centuries of carpus. . . . dripping death outside a lair-hauls of bats from night-black ruins of buried temples of Belial. . . . Now, as the baying of that dead, fleshless monstrosity grows louder and louder, and the stealthy whirring and flapping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer, I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnamable.

Another Uncanny Story by H. P. Lovecraft Will Appear in an Early Issue of Weird Tales.

THE HATER

(Continued from page 75)

With a sob Ivan went out into the snow. For days he walked the frozen tundra—alone. Only at night did he come to the village for food.

Those who saw him shook their heads. "It is coming back," they said sorrowfully. "He is forgetting the little flower girl.

Then one morning Ivan staggered into the town, gaunt and haggard.

"Call the people together," he said hollowly, and the soldiers noted the glint in his eye.

He picked one of the men from the mass—old Zenoff the robber it was—had him stripped and tied to the whipping post.

"Twenty blows," he commanded the soldiers hoarsely, but the sight of blood sickened him.

"No! No!" he cried after a few blows, "I can't!"

He gave the suffering man a piece of gold, and went to his empty cottage. There he sat in a stupor. He knew now that no more could he enjoy the sufferings of others. Maria had killed that—forever.

"Ah, Ivan," he muttered over and over to himself "what a fool you are!"

Then, finally, with something like a smile: "Ah, Ivan, how I hate you—how I hate you!"

Suddenly a light broke over his face.

"Ha! Ivan," he exulted wildly, "you can kill the one you hate!" The glint in his eye sparkled and danced.

The next morning the peasants found him hanging from a beam of his cottage. His arms were opened wide, and on his face was that pleased, satiated smile, in his eyes a cold, hateful glint—fixed there forever.

THE EYRIE

WHEN one is looking at things—whether it be the Woolworth Building, a June bug, or a dish of ham and eggs—one's viewpoint "matters enormously," as our friend Ruggles used to say. We have here a letter from a correspondent in San Francisco, who, after some rapturous comment on the glorious summer weather there (all Californians talk that way, of course), puts this snappy question to us: "Does sunny weather in December sound like fiction to you in the East?"

The "East"! And only this morning we heard from a friend in New York who congratulated us on trying to publish a magazine "way out there in the wooly West." It all depends, you see, on where you're standing. When you look at a housefly with your unaided eye it seems merely a harmless insect, but a powerful microscope reveals a hideous monster. A mountain never seems as big when you stand at its base as it does when you see it five miles away.

From a geologic viewpoint, man has lived on this planet only a few seconds; but, measured by time as we compute it, he has been here for hundreds of thousands of years. All of which brings us, in a roundabout fashion, to what we really started out to say: Why is it that the industrious writers, who keep writing stories for WEIRD TALES, choose almost every subject save that of prehistoric man?

Here, it seems to us, is an unexplored field that should yield rich returns to the author of weird fiction. It's a field, too, where he may give his imagination a free rein and let it run riot. He can say practically anything he pleases about our ancestors who lived half a million years ago, and nobody can dispute him. He needn't watch his step for fear somebody will trip him up. No matter who he is, he knows as much about his subject as anybody else. All that any of us know about our prehistoric forbears could be neatly contained in a thin volume; and what we don't know about them would, if printed, fill a library.

Life probably was exciting in those distant days, ages ago, but quite likely the people who lived then thought it very ordinary. Now, however, looking at it from our modern civilization, it seems weird and strange and full of fascination. Again, it is a matter of viewpoint.

We offer the idea for what it is worth; and we hope that pretty soon some of our earnest contributors will be sending us stories about "The Man Who Lived in a Tree," or "The Ape Girl," or "The Six-Hundred-Foot Lizard."

WE seemed to have stirred up something when we dwelt, in these columns, on that extraordinary story, "The Transparent Ghost;" and now we shall probably stir up something else by starting the story in this issue of WEIRD TALES. At any rate, the story is started—and will be finished. Like an alarm clock, a story such as this has got to keep going until it runs down and stops with a gasp that seems to say: "I'm out of breath and can't go on."

If we were to print all the letters that were written to us concerning "The Transparent Ghost" we should need half the pages in this magazine; and so the best we can do is to publish only a few of them and submit brief comments on the rest. This huge mass of letters presents an interesting diversity of opinion. Some of them gravely inform us that the author's note (printed verbatim in the November Eyrie) contains a dozen misspelled words. Others hold that the manuscript should be carefully edited, the spelling patched up

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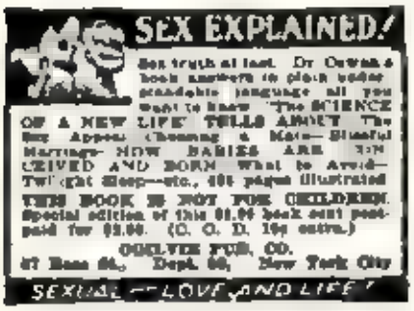

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and the grammar repaired, before it is offered to intelligent readers. And still others contend that even the author's title is wrong, since all ghosts are supposed to be transparent.

Most of our correspondents, however, expressed a desire to see the story. They adjured, entreated and commanded us to print it. And since we agreed to be governed by the majority, the story went to the printer; and it went and came exactly as the author wrote it. Not so much as a semicolon was changed. Who are we that we should try to paint a rose or add luster to a pearl?

The following communication, which came from Duluth, Minnesota, is fairly typical of dozens that voted for the story:

"Dear Sir: If you do not publish Mrs. Manser's 'story,' 'The Transparent Ghost,' I will be the most disappointed man on God's green footstool. Although Mrs. Manser's literary style is distinctly Henry Jamesian, her spelling would make Ring Lardner turn green with envy. Editors have been blamed for the serious shortage of servant girls in this country. It is claimed that the girls can make more money writing stories for the magazines. If you don't believe it, read the magazines. Nevertheless, whatever Mrs. Manser's former occupation was, the world will rejoice that she has forsaken it for literature. I sincerely hope that you will publish Mrs. Manser's 'story' in WEIRD TALES. I have a creepy feeling that it will be the weirdest 'tail' that has ever been written or wagged.—Jeremiah Joykiller."

Walter F. Lee, Jr., of Denver waxes lyrical in expressing his opinion. Thus:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Tres bon, monsieur! C'est magnifique! Bravo! Thrice bravo!

"All of which somewhat pyrotechnic beginning is in reference to the incomparably written letter published, in the November issue of WEIRD TALES, over your pleasurably facetious explanation thereof. By all means (this may be regarded as a vote) let us have this masterpiece of (undoubtedly) weird fiction: 'The Transparent Ghost,' even at the risk of causing the inimitable Poe to go through the proverbial change of posture in his tomb. . . .

"Honestly, though, Mr. Baird, I would be willing to attempt the transportation—utilizing my olfactory organ—of a sizable peanut from Denver to Evanston in exchange for the privilege of reading those extraordinary stories. In case you should desire me to perform

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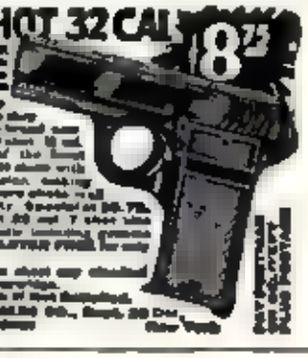

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the above-mentioned feat (and my nose is none too Herculean) you may 'address me letters to the address below.'

"But, consigning all the preceding levity to its own particular hell, I shall hasten to thank you for your unprecedented attention to one in whose manly countenance, figuratively, the editorial doors hitherto have been impolitely though no less repeatedly slammed.

"Now (and I confess to a certain premonition), I must close what, to you, I am certain has been an extremely incoherent epistle. I wrote it on the spur of the moment; directly after I read the Eyrie's first paragraph, and during the silent laughter thereby produced. I don't know whether you have ever read—or even heard of—Edgar Franklin's stories in the Argosy-All-Story; but, anyhow, I was afforded—by that paragraph—more pleasure than ever I encountered in his stories. And Edgar Franklin sings wicked sarcasm!"

THE following interesting letter from Whitmore Anderson Gaydon of Selma, Alabama, though voting for "The Transparent Ghost," seems less concerned with that unique tale than with certain peculiarities of tales in general:

"Dear Sir: As we all seem to want to be a happy little family of 'Weirders' by all means let us have Mrs. Manser's tale. But let me tell you what I object to. It is the fact that every time an author stops to get his breath he remarks that 'Mr So-and-so SHRUGGED HIS SHOULDERS.' I find the pages of the dry-as-dust literalists because that old bruised and bleeding phrase was driving me mad. I took up the reading of WEIRD TALES, thinking the originality of your publication would afford me measure of relief. But here the old grinning skeleton comes rattling its detestable way right into the midst of every story.

"Now, Mr. Editor, in the interest of harmony in the family, delete that phrase. Or at least vary it to read 'Mr. X wiggled his right ear.' 'Mr. X sneezed.' 'Mr. W's belch was accompanied by an audible grunt,' etc.

"I enjoyed 'The Phantom Violinist' more than any of the stories, probably from the fact that I knew how to appreciate it. As most of my prizes that I have won as a fiddler has been while seemingly under a mysterious outside Power. Playing by inspiration, as it were."

Dick Pressley Tooker, author of

"Planet Paradise," also cast his vote for the story:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Just a note to let you know my vote on 'The Transparent Ghost' question is: 'PRINT IT!' It must be a masterpiece of HUMOR, if the letter is a good specimen.

"I was glad to look around for your novel, 'Fay.' It in no wise inconvenienced me. I hack around the bookstores quite a deal.

"Thanks for putting out a whale of a magazine in the November W. T. After running that eloquent and stirring story 'The People of the Comet,' I had supposed you had printed the best thing in existence on the subject, but to come back with 'Draconda!' I take off my hat to John Martin Leahy. All I don't like about it is that, after running it, my story 'Planet Paradise,' will be too poisonous for the public to swallow. But here's hoping half as much pleasure is squeezed from it as I experienced in giving it birth."

FLATTERING—and interesting, too—is this letter from Charles M Boone, Third Officer of the Steamship Yumuri:

"Editor, W. T.—By all means let us have Mrs. Ina-Belle Manser's 'Transparent Ghost!' If it is as good as the letter, and your comment relative thereto, it must be unusual at least. As for the difficulty in deciding whether it is a 'puzzle picture or a new interpretation of the Einstein theory,' forget it—few of us know the difference, anyway.

"Let us have more of Mr. Austin Hall's work. He is a good metaphysician as well as an entertaining writer. His story held my interest strong enough to cure a nasty headache. All weird stories that are in any manner connected with astronomy, or its parent study of astrology, are good. . . .

"Such little yarns as Valens Lapsley's, 'The Pebble Prophecy,' and Burton Harcourt's, 'The Wax Image,' are very good. Your weakest point is in the humorous stories. Some of them are very good; some otherwise. In my estimation, 'An Adventure in the Fourth Dimension' is very good; 'The Autobiography of a Blue Ghost' is otherwise.

"You will be pleased to know, Mr. Baird, that W. T. is still going strong on board the Yumuri. Still does some good too! Several of the boys have given up the drinking of Mexican 'white mule,' claiming that there is more real excitement found between the covers of W. T. . . . A manager of a so-called 'soft drink' establishment on Rampart

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"My friend, Mr. Weeks, and I are still rooting for W. T. and still wish you every possible success in promoting the interests of WEIRD TALES, the most highly interesting of all magazines."

We dislike to ruin the business of this "soft-drink" man, and we suggest that he confine his activity to caramel sundaes and banana splits.

F. C. McKnight, a fourteen-year-old boy of Louisville, writes us that he thinks "somebody is playing a joke on you with that 'Transparent Ghost' stuff," and Herbert J. Lalonde of Syracuse, N. Y., advances the opinion that the person who wrote the story "is some great unknown author masquerading." Oh well. . . . Here's a lengthy letter from Medford, Oregon that reviews, with refreshing candor some of our stories and some of our faults:

"Dear Sir: May I express my opinion of the current issue of WEIRD TALES? I have read most of the previous issues, and believe that the magazine fills a decided need, but, of course, there is room for further improvement—there always is, in anything. Let me ask that what I have to say be regarded as my personal opinion only; that is what you want, I believe. If I say a story is poor, that doesn't mean that it is poor, but simply that I think it is. So here goes.

"In the first place, by all means let us have 'The Transparent Ghost,' by Mrs. Isabelle Manzer. We frequently hear in a general way of some of the queer stories submitted to editors, but it is seldom that we have an opportunity to actually see one in full.

"DRAGONDA is good. It is a little too technical in parts, but its very technicality makes it convincing, and is also the means of some clever humor, such as the suggestion that the sun's path is in the form of a corkscrew or a fish-hook, and that the gas 'geocoronium' is surrounded by another gas called 'perhapsium.' I shall look forward with interest to the next installment.

"And this brings me to another point. It is unfair to your readers to print a serial story without any indication in either the title of the story or the index that it is to be a serial. Let serials stand on their own merits, and not on the fact that the reader has unwittingly

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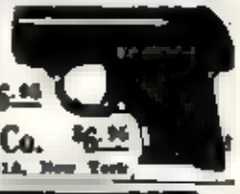

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read it to the 'to be continued' line before he realizes that it is not complete. A magazine to which I am partial displays prominently in both the index and the heading of all serial stories the legend 'A four-part story—part I,' or II, or III, as the case may be. The reader who starts it knows exactly what to expect when he gets to the last page, and for how many issues the story will run. I commend this to your attention.

"**THE CRAWLING DEATH** is fair—a little too illogical to be good.

"**THE CLOSED ROOM** is a good story, logical when the fact that Norman's mind is diseased is taken into consideration.

"**THE PHANTOM VIOLINIST** is a space filler only—neither good nor bad.

"**LUCIFER** is excellent. Well written and convincing, and, very properly for this kind of a story, no attempted explanation. In my opinion purely ghost stories are not complete without a rational explanation, while stories based on the occult, or on well-known superstitions, are stronger without any attempt to explain.

"**THE SPIDER** is not even a good space filler.

"**THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF JOE SCRANTON** is a good idea, fairly well handled, but would have been a little more satisfying with a happy ending. This particular story needs it.

"**THE IRON ROOM** is a good average detective story, but has no place in **WEIRD TALES**—it is not in any way a weird tale.

"**PRISONERS OF THE DEAD** is very good—contains a good plot, logically worked out and satisfyingly explained.

"**THE DEATH FIT** ranks next to 'Lucifer' in excellence among the stories in this number. The plot is good, the required element of horror and tragedy is there, and the story is not spoiled at the end by the police and Tim's arrest for murder.

"**THE WAX IMAGE** is also very good, and in line with my idea regarding stories based on popular superstitions, makes no attempt to explain. A very good story, and well written.

"**POISONED** is good, but would have been better had not both of the principal characters borne the same given name. This confuses the reader, who has to stop and think as to who is who, and detracts from the interest that should be given to the plot. The ending is good.

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SEX

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ful little piece, more like a fairy tale than a weird story. I enjoyed this.

"**THE INVISIBLE MONSTER** is good. The writer's style is an attempt, with some success, to pattern after Poe, and the style helps the story.

"**THE PEBBLE PROPHECY** is unconvincing. As a story based on superstition it is a failure, because the prophecy was false, and the ghost is unconvincing unless explained.

"**THE TELL-TALE HEART** In your last number I noted a question as to whether these old masterpieces of weird fiction should be continued. My vote is 'Yes.' Stories like 'The Pit' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart' give your present writers a mark to shoot at.

"By far the best story you have published for some time was the one in the October number of the clergyman who had the adventure with the three were-wolves, the loup-garou of the French Canadian. This was excellent, competently written, and very satisfactorily ended. I was afraid as I came to the end of the story that there would be an attempt at a happy ending, with a love-match and a marriage, but I was agreeably disappointed. I regret to say that I have forgotten the name of the tale, but the story remains with me." ("The Phantom Farmhouse" by Seabury Quinn.—Editor.)

"This letter has stretched out to a greater length than I intended, for which I hope you will accept my apologies. The magazine on the whole is good, and deserves success.

"If you use this or any portion of it in 'The Eyrie' please do not use my name."—Reader and Well-wisher.

Candid too, is the following "confession" from Walter F. McCanless of Reidsville, North Carolina

"Dear Mr. Baird: It seems that I have to beg everybody's pardon, and I now do so. In addition, I want to give an explanation of my attack upon a perfectly good story. 'I live at Greensboro and have my work here. As a result of this dual citizenship almost all of my copies of **WEIRD TALES** were in Greensboro when I wrote my letter. On this week-end visit I brought all copies back with me, and, on receiving your letter, reviewed the back numbers. Can you imagine such a thing?—I had two entirely different stories in mind. 'The Whispering Thing' is the two-part story I had in mind and the criticism I made applies largely to the second part. 'The Damned Thing' had 'No. 2' beside it and, somehow, I imagined it was a

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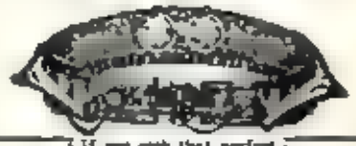

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continuation of the other and my mistake followed. I am deeply sorry.

"As to the publication of a part of my letter—I imagine you must have the first part of it in mind and have wondered at the concluding portion—you have my consent, provided it is the first part. But the last part—how you must have wondered! No; the Volstead act is strictly enforced here, and, too, I am as strictly temperate!

"With best wishes for the success of 'Pay.'"

WE'RE getting a number of letters about Austin Hall's strange serial, "The People of the Comet," and a good sample is the following from M. Gladden Abernathy of the U. S. Naval Radio Station at San Diego:

"Dear Mr. Baird: On finishing the November issue of WEIRD TALES, I noticed in the Eyrie your mention of so many reports on the story by Austin Hall, 'The People of the Comet.' I couldn't resist telling you what I think of the story. Some day the theme or theory of that story is going to be proven. This whole universe of ours will probably be discovered to be only a part of one hair on the tail of some monstrous mongrel dog in a monstrous world, only one of a universe inconceivably larger than this, and this universe will probably be only a tiny particle of some other insignificant little insect in another world in a still bigger universe. With all this theory floating around, someone will dig in and prove it.

"On account of my probably moving any time, I do not regularly subscribe to your magazines, but I have a standing order with a local dealer to save me one of each issue. I have read about all the magazines in your line, but cannot say that a one of them ever beat even one story in any one of yours.

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THE EDITOR

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The Killer

By HAROLD WARD

"The Oath of Hippocrates—An oath embodying an admirable code of medical ethics. . . . taken by young men about to begin medical practice. . . ."—Webster.

THE KILLER halted at the window of the tarpaper-covered shack and, nose pressed against the glass, sought to penetrate the gloomy interior. Satisfied that the place was unoccupied, he fought his way against the force of the storm to the spot where his eyes had marked the outline of a door.

The thermometer showed a temperature of twenty below. The storm was increasing in violence every minute and The Killer was half frozen. Yet he stood with hand on the knob, making no effort to enter until his stiffened fingers had sought out the gun which nestled snugly in his outside pocket. With his teeth he drew the mitten from his right hand and, with an effort that caused him to groan aloud with pain, crooked his benumbed forefinger around the trigger.

Cautiously turning the knob, he threw open the door and stumbled across the threshold in a tumultuous gale of wind and a whirl of snow. For an instant he stood there listening, every faculty alert. Then, satisfied that he was alone, he put his back against the panel and closed the door against the violence of the storm.

The room was cold and tomblike. Yet to the Killer, driven from place to place like a mad dog, it offered a haven for the night. He was tired—dead weary from traveling for what seemed centuries through snow waist-deep in the face of the worst blizzard of the season. Every muscle, every nerve, ached with exhaustion. For the last mile he had fought against an ever-increasing desire to succumb to the feeling of drowsiness which crept over him. He was lost. Only his powerful will had kept him on his feet thus far

Sliding his gun back into his pocket, he whipped his hands against his chest and stamped his feet until circulation was partly restored. Then, shaking the accumulation of snow from his shoulders, he unbuttoned his overcoat and fumbled in his vest pocket until he found a match. Striking it against the door, he held it aloft to view his surroundings. It flickered weakly, nearly went out, then burned brightly. By its yellow glow he distinguished a nearby table on which stood a kerosene lamp. It took but an instant to apply the stump of the match to the wick.

He was in what appeared to be a combined kitchen and living-room. The light danced and threw grotesque shadows on the walls, covered with cheap

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pictures cut from newspapers. Shelving filled with dishes—covered with papers with the edges scalloped and crimped—behind the cook stove in the corner. A slab of bacon hanging over a can of flour, a box beside the stove filled with great chunks of wood—all told of comforts that were his for the taking. A pair of slippers, run down at the heel, and an apron thrown across the back of a chair showed that a woman's presence had graced the room not long before.

The Killer's eyes fell upon the opening leading to another room. Cautiously he drew his gun and tiptoed toward the faded curtain which served as a door. A board creaked beneath his weight. He stopped short, every nerve tingling.

From behind the curtain came a groan. Then a woman's voice, plaintive, pain-racked:

"Is that you, William?"

The Killer made no answer. With body hunched forward, poised on the balls of his feet, his glittering black eyes never left the curtained opening. His gun was well in front of him, his thumb on the hammer.

"Why don't you answer me, William?" came the voice again. "Please hurry. You have been gone so long and I'm so sick."

The Killer twisted his body to one side of the opening where he would be partly out of range.

"It's not William," he answered gruffly. "I'm a stranger lost in the storm. Are you alone?"

The woman gave a startled cry. "Yes—Oh! God, yes!" she answered. "And I'm sick—awful sick. Please help me."

"Are you armed?" asked The Killer.

Without waiting for an answer, he picked up the lamp and, stuffing the gun back into his pocket—but with fingers still locked around the butt—he pushed aside the curtain and entered.

The woman who lay between the coverlets was young. But now her face was drawn with pain and pinched with cold. A startled look appeared in her eyes as the grim visage of The Killer appeared within range of her vision, and she shrank back closer to the wall. The Killer stepped closer to the bed and eyed her questioningly.

"Hump!" he grunted. "Fire! Hot water! Pans!—where are they?"

He lighted a lamp which stood on a stand near the bed, the woman's eyes following every move, filled with wonder and fear.

"Are you a—a doctor?" she asked weakly.

The Killer smiled wryly. Then he

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shrugged his shoulders as if to shake off some memory.

"Used to be—years ago," he answered gruffly. "Guess I've not forgotten all I know. Got nothing to work with, though. But how the devil do you come to be here alone—and in this condition?"

"My husband—William Stevenson—he's sheriff," she explained between twinges of pain. "He went away yesterday—after a bad man—a man named Henshaw—they call him 'The Killer.' Right after he went the storm broke, and then this—"

She halted lamely for an instant, then, as if seeking to defend her absent husband, she continued: "He—The Killer—has an awful record. Murdered a man in cold blood a week ago in Erie—Killed another several months ago. When William heard that he was seen in Milledgeville—that's thirty miles away, over the mountains—he felt that he had to go. He hated to leave me, but he didn't think that *this*—would happen, and—"

The Killer turned his back so that she might not see the look of amazement on his face. "Bad snow slide down the canyon," he answered. "Happened right after I came through. That's what's holding him. And now, madam—Mrs. Stevenson—quit fretting and let me get to work."

He picked up the lamp and bore it back into the kitchen. Setting it on the table, he scratched his head with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Now ain't this a hell of a fix!" he murmured to himself. "Bill Stevenson's wife—the wife of Sheriff Bill—and he sworn to get me, dead or alive."

Slowly, his eyes filled with a far-away look, and he buttoned his overcoat and drew down the flaps of his cap. Outside the storm still raged. The wind was growing higher. It howled and whistled around the corners, rattling the windows and shaking the doors. The snow would cover his tracks in five minutes. Of course the woman would die—she and the kid. But what difference! She was the wife of his worst enemy, and the kid would be his brat.

"I furthermore swear that—"

Damn those memories of other days! Wraithlike, they insisted on appearing before him. For some reason, he could not get them out of his mind. And damn that old fool, Hippocrates, and his nonsensical oath! What business was it of his? He had long ago given up medicine. Let the woman die if she wanted to.

But the baby! Curse the baby! Of course it was the sheriff's flesh and blood—but it was innocent. Why did the

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thoughts of the baby come to torture him—to keep him from making his escape?

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"Oh, doctor! *Please—please hurry!*"

It was the woman's voice—sobbing—pain-filled.

The Killer hesitated a second longer. Then he turned and, hurling mittens and overcoat into a corner, he commenced heaping kindlings into the stove.

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